

CONSTELLATIONS

CULTURE CHANGE FUND AND INITIATIVE

NARRATIVE SYSTEM AND VALUES

[Cultural Power's practice of narrative strategy](#) leverages the power of arts and culture to empower Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian American Pacific Islander and POC artists to:

- (1) dismantle harmful narratives (i.e. based on extraction and white supremacy)
- (2) transform existing narratives, and
- (3) create and amplify narratives (i.e. based on interdependence, empathy, and care)

Constellations' narrative system provides the specific narratives that we want to advance. We worked with Janelle Treibitz to create our set of deep narratives that define the core underlying beliefs of the future we want and need. This is our North Star that supports narrative alignment across our initiative. As the Butterfly Lab for Immigrant Narrative Strategy explains in their [Narrative Design Toolkit](#), "Transforming people's worldviews and belief systems, and creating the sustainable cultural conditions for them to choose, behave, and act differently is the deep and rigorous work of building narrative power for social justice."

DEFINITION OF TERMS

NARRATIVE: An array of related and connected stories and messages on a particular subject, issue, or problem. They suggest causes, problems and solutions. We interpret stories and messages through them. Narratives evoke emotion, offer analysis, and suggest action; they tell us how we should feel, think, and act. Narrative is the level at which society moves.

DEEP NARRATIVE: An underlying belief that transmits a value. Deep Narratives provide the logic for a worldview, and manifest as a "core belief" or "gut instinct" that guide people to determine whether something is right or wrong. Some people refer to them as mindsets, meta-narratives, or mental models.

NARRATIVE SYSTEM: A set of deep narratives that, taken together, create a worldview.

NARRATIVE STRATEGY: the praxis of using stories, messages, and narratives purposefully to move people towards narratives, deep narratives, and worldviews we want to advance

CULTURAL STRATEGY: A Cultural Strategy is a practice that leverages the catalytic and emotional power of culture and the arts to shift attitudes, behaviors, resources, narratives and power.

DEEP NARRATIVES

We steward the past and the future.

We understand our lives as part of an arc that stretches long before and long after our single lifetimes. We are made stronger by connecting with and learning from our elders and from the past. We choose our actions today based on the impact they will have on generations into the future.¹

We are interdependent.

We live in an interconnected relationship with each other and with all life on earth. We understand our fates are intertwined and that to move forward, we must move forward together. There is a responsibility in understanding our connection to one another, and we must act from the knowledge of how our decisions ripple beyond ourselves.²

We thrive when we care for each other.

Wellbeing is fundamental for individual and community health, and giving care to those who need it is a shared responsibility. We prioritize caring for communities, our loved ones, and ourselves, and believe that our institutions and governing systems must be oriented to support wellbeing. We understand collective wellbeing as a core measurement of success for an economy, a culture, and a society.

Our survival depends on balance.

Healthy ecosystems depend on equilibrium. Excesses or scarcity can throw us into imbalance. In both nature and society, we are beholden to the natural equilibriums at play. Imbalance has consequences, thus regaining and maintaining equilibrium is a perpetual responsibility. Reaching equilibrium can open the possibility of balance and harmony in our relationship with Earth and with each other.

We determine our lives and our future.

In order to thrive, communities must be able to forge their own path in developing cultural, political, and economic systems.³ Individuals must have the agency to make decisions about their lives.⁴ When we honor each other's right to self-determination, we recognize our uniqueness, capacities, and wisdom. We honor lessons learned over generations. We learn from each other and we all grow.

We create abundance.

We are creatures of infinite possibility. When we practice love, care, and mutuality, we create opportunities for joy and connection. When we embrace our creativity and imagination, we

¹ Derived in part from the Seven Generations Principle, Iroquois Confederacy philosophy

² Language borrowed from Race Forward's [Butterfly Lab Narrative System](#)

³ Language borrowed from the [MIT CoLab's Self Determination Narratives Fellowship](#)

⁴ Language borrowed from Race Forward's [Butterfly Lab Narrative System](#)

innovate and find the solutions we need. When we own our power and generosity, we move our communities forward. Together we can create the shared future we imagine.

Our lives have inherent value and dignity.

All life has value and dignity. We recognize that every person and every form of life is unique and also part of something larger than itself. We recognize each other's potential and our interconnectedness. We believe that we all deserve joy and rest. We believe that we should be able to exist and express pride in being, practicing, and transmitting our identities, as long as we do not harm or debase the dignity and identity of others.⁵

VALUES

Values form the foundation of Constellations. In 2021, the Founding Design Team worked with Sage Crump to articulate our shared values as well as the questions we must hold to embody those values in our work together. These values provided the basis for the creation of our deep narratives, described above.

SELF-DETERMINATION

We believe in the sovereignty of every living thing. More specifically, we believe people should have authorship and agency over their own lives. This does not negate the relationship and accountability an individual has to the collective, but rather it grounds the importance and responsibility of every individual to learn and live into their purpose for the wellbeing of the whole. We intend to be a practice space that allows, invites and supports people to engage in Constellations from their place of peak aliveness with a high degree of communication and flexibility.

"We can disagree and still love each other unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist." - Robert Jones Jr.

Pivot points:

- How are we holding the tension of multiple needs?
- How are we helping each other name our needs?
- What can people decide for themselves?
- How can we make our system nimble and responsive to the individual while not losing sight of the collective?

ITERATION

We believe that change is constant and it is an amalgam of what has come before, what is, and what is to come. This belief pushes past the Western linear relationship to time and creates opportunity, learning and accountability across the past, present and future. This means we deeply engage ancestral ways of knowing, investigate the present for experiments and attempt ways of being that align with our imagined future. We treat this

⁵ Language borrowed from Race Forward's [Butterfly Lab Narrative System](#)

moment as a practice space rich with opportunities for learning even in the face of risk and uncertainty.

"It is not easy to face the death of how things have been and open up to the vulnerability of how things could be. But we must." - Alexis Pauline Gumbs

Pivot points:

- What can you and we imagine? What will it take for you and us to get there?
- How has this been addressed before?
- What would make it different in this current context?
- If we keep moving in this way, who is the long term beneficiary of this decision?
- What will likely have changed?

INTERDEPENDENCE

We believe that every aspect of a system is equally valuable even when they have different functions. Every aspect is included in this living system - including the Earth, plant life, animals, humanity and other forms of life yet to be known. We believe Constellations is an ecosystem that is influenced and influences a larger system. A healthy ecosystem "listens" to all of the parts and adjusts. No singular part of an ecosystem is asked to change alone. Collective adjustments are available to an ecosystem when there is clear communication, boundaries and activated emotional and verbal intelligences.

"You cannot change any society unless you take responsibility for it, unless you see yourself as belonging to it and responsible for changing it." - Grace Lee Boggs

Pivot points:

- Whose "voices" should be part of this decision to help build this practice?
- Where is decision-making power shared?
- If it feels like power cannot be shared, why?

BALANCE

We believe in an equilibrium through the lens of justice. Thus balance is contextual, and can only be achieved through an analysis of the flow between abundance and scarcity. We recognize that working through the lens of balance can amplify the rigor and minimize the liberalism in our practices. Reviewing who has been left out and looking at obstacles is as valuable as saying we welcome all with open arms and there is enough for everyone. We intend to interrogate all of the interstitial space between those polarities to make decisions and find processes that honor our attempt at equilibrium that right injustices and seed the world we know is possible.

"All that you touch you change. All that you change changes you. The only constant is change." - Octavia Butler

Pivot points:

- What feels scarce or abundant in this context?
- What is materially scarce or abundant in this context?

- What can I pull from to soothe the emotional or material sense of scarcity?
- What needs refreshing or replenishing?

MUTUALITY

We believe that every party engaged in a commitment with one another should have explicit benefit from the exchange. Being intentional about mutual benefit helps avoid paternalism and identifies power within relationships. This is integral to building collective solutions that don't simply paint over racial monopoly capitalist culture as transformation. Through mutuality, we acknowledge the sacred in each other, in all life, and act from that position seeking ways to invest in each other.

"Hide nothing from the masses of our people. Tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told. Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories." - Amilcar Cabral

Pivot points:

- How do we "transform in the service of the work"?
- Have we named any power arrangements at play?
- Are we communicating clearly with each other in a transparent and vulnerable way?
- What do we need in this situation that will support our growth and learning?

COMPLEXITY

We believe that complexity is the natural state of all living systems. A focus on complexity asks to stay engaged at the level of relationship. No decision or practice happens in a silo. Every person, team or aspect of the ecosystem impacts the other. An awareness of complexity supports the building of more generous and generative ways of being. It reminds us that there is no singular answer or "right" way and grows the empathy needed to stay open to each other.

"There might be rigorous honest work to be done by grounding our critiques, at least partially, in our complicity." --Kiese Laymon

Pivot points:

- What is at this intersection?
- What is the impact of this on that?
- What is the impact of that on this?
- What personal needs are at play?
- What organizational needs are at play?
- What boundaries feel immovable and why?

SELF REFLECTION & GROWTH

We believe that there is a relationship between the interior of the self and the external conditions of the world we live in. Accountability, interdependence, wholeness and health are predicated on the ability to see self and an awareness of your relationship to the whole. Self in this context can mean an individual person or team. Cycles of reflection allow for the learning necessary to generate new grounded possibilities. We create intentional time for reflection and amplify self reflection and growth as an important capacity for initiative and

institutional sustainability.

"The focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations that we seek to escape but the piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us." - Audre Lorde

Pivot points:

- Does this situation remind me of a past experience?
- What is guiding my belief in this future possibility?
- What scares me and makes me uncomfortable about this?
- Can I find a life affirming longing to ground my decision/practice?