



HOUSING • 
NARRATIVE LAB

2023 IMPACT REPORT

The Housing Narrative Lab is a narrative research and communications hub that shifts public understanding about the root causes of homelessness and unstable housing.

We know that every victory for rights and freedoms, from civil rights to marriage equality, was built on narrative change work because to win policies and judicial rulings, we have to build a larger base of support. That happens only when we change what people feel and believe about issues or people.

To change what the general public thinks about the causes of homelessness and unstable housing we conduct research and create messages that resonate with base and persuadable audiences; tell stories that move people to action; and uncover narratives that give people a shared vision of what is possible.

We do this work in four ways: Conducting research and helping partners implement the results, providing training and education on narrative and storytelling, building capacity through narrative and strategic communications support, and collaborating with partner organizations. This is what it looks like to build narrative infrastructure in the housing space – when everyone, everywhere, all the time can advance a transformational housing narrative at scale, consistently and through repetition. This year, strong narrative infrastructure in housing and homelessness is critical as we face a well-resourced and coordinated opposition to solve homelessness and housing insecurity.

We've done a lot since we got started in 2021 and, as you'll see in the report below, 2023 was a huge year of growth for the Lab.

Join us for even more in '24.

Warmly,
Marisol, Sarah, Claire, Dustin, Grover and Jeff

P.S. Check out our [“We’re the Housing Narrative Lab” reel](#) on Instagram.





RESEARCH

We connect research with action so that people and organizations can effectively implement our research findings.

In 2023, we were busy conducting listening tours and focus groups and recently wrapped up or are about to complete research in the middle of the country – Tulsa, Omaha and the state of Minnesota.

As part of our research we test the best messages to move audiences, analyze why particular messages resonate with which audiences, create message guides and sample content that shows how to put the tested messages and narratives into practice. All this helps organizations move from knowledge to action.

EDUCATION & TRAINING

Narrative training and capacity building was a major part of our work in 2023. We provided over 20 virtual and in-person storytelling and narrative trainings to more than 900 people in almost two dozen cities.

SOME HIGHLIGHTS:

- ▶ Six-part training with Lived Experience Advisors in San Diego.
- ▶ Two-day convening for members of the Albuquerque Affordable Housing Coalition.
- ▶ Storytelling training in advance of National Low-Income Housing Coalition's Hill Day for advocates who want to share their personal stories.
- ▶ All-day storytelling training with two dozen members of Housing California's Resident United Network.
- ▶ Two-day in-person narrative convening for families and youth with lived experience, homeless and housing advocates, community organizers, funders and city officials in New York City as part of our work with the New York City Fund to End Youth & Family Homelessness.

Our webinars highlighted journalism that told nuanced housing and homelessness stories, the importance of joy in this hard work, art and creative storytelling approaches and the intersection of homelessness and healthcare. Three of our webinars featured and were planned with people who have experienced homelessness and unstable housing.

FEBRUARY

A CONVERSATION WITH HEADWAY

an initiative of The New York Times



MATT THOMPSON
Headway, The New York Times



TERRY PARRIS JR.
Headway, The New York Times

JUNE

LEADING WITH JOY

Building a housing movement grounded in hope



DR. TIFFANY MANUEL
TheCaseMade



MARISOL BELLO
Housing Narrative Lab

OCTOBER

THE POWER OF ART

Creative Storytelling for Change



ANDREW MORTON
Sofa Stories Detroit



DARIA E. NIMBEE
Sofa Stories Detroit



MARLA JOHNSON
Art from the Streets



QINGJUN HUANG
Photographer

STRATEGIC SUPPORT

The Lab provided significant capacity building and technical assistance to national and local organizations, especially to organizations in under-resourced communities. In addition, the Lab offered significant pro-bono communications support to national and local partners including National Coalition for Housing Justice, Lived Experience Advisors and National Homelessness Law Center.

WE CREATED USEFUL AND TIMELY RESOURCES FOR THE FIELD INCLUDING:

- ▶ TV Academy resource for writers and show runners on representation, real causes of homelessness and accurate storylines.
- ▶ Half a dozen published op-eds, such as this [recent opinion](#) by Phyllis Blanck, an advocate who was formerly homeless in San Diego, outlining the ways criminalization of homelessness made her situation much worse.
- ▶ Media advisories and strategic communications support that resulted in 60 articles. We provided press and communications strategy and support on rapid response issues such as the story of a Boise, Idaho family that was [violently arrested](#) for camping on public land. We also advised and were quoted in the podcast, [Young, Unhoused and Unseen](#), a collaboration of Temple University's Logan Center for Urban Investigative Reporting and WHYY, the Philadelphia NPR-affiliate.
- ▶ A [free message guide](#) featuring five tested messages and analysis of why they performed well.
- ▶ A [free field guide](#) for the field including the fundamentals of how to write for impact, pitch media, write op eds, post effectively on social media and more.
- ▶ A social media guide including insights on the best platforms to use to reach specific audiences.
- ▶ [Message guidance](#) to counter immigrant / asylum blame, [translated into Spanish](#) that was shared widely.



FIELD BUILDING

The Lab is collaborative by nature, knowing that we all have essential roles to play in shifting deeply embedded narratives about homelessness, poverty and deservedness. We are part of multiple coalitions and support communications and narrative strategy and implementation both locally and nationally.

EXAMPLES:

- ▶ Developing message guidance and an overview of the Framework project and ongoing work with National Coalition for Housing Justice, immigration rights groups and more.
- ▶ Working with LA Housing & Homelessness Communications Collaborative to share a vision of housing for all LA County residents, regardless of background or circumstance.
- ▶ Conducting a three-part training series with Here Together in Portland to counter attacks on a recently passed supportive housing services measure.
- ▶ Building relationships with other narrative shops who recognize the importance of partnership and authentic collaboration.

Thank you to our philanthropic supporters and project partners. We are so grateful for your support!

GENERAL SUPPORT

