

AFTER THE FIRE:
Growing a New Narrative
2025 Impact Report

HOUSING
NARRATIVE
LAB • 



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Everywhere, All the Time

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Powering a New Narrative

Too many people in our country struggle to pay rent or find housing that is decent and affordable. But the stories we see and hear everyday don't reflect that reality. It's one reason why the public remains stuck thinking that people choose to live outside or that paying more than half of your income on a home is normal. **To create a world where everyone has a safe and affordable place to live, we have to tell more stories that connect with people and move them to action.** That's why the Housing Narrative Lab exists — to shape a new, effective narrative that builds public support for the kinds of investments in housing we all need. Visit housingnarrativelab.org to learn more.

Partner With Us

Reach out at info@housingnarrativelab.org to talk about how together we can ensure everyone has an affordable and safe place to call home.



A Message from Executive Director Marisol Bello

Dear Friends,

No sugarcoating here, folks, 2025 was a tough year for those of us committed to solving housing insecurity and homelessness. We saw the federal government slash funding and dismantle programs to support people struggling to keep a roof over their heads. Across the country, we witnessed increasing homeless encampment raids and a mandate to forcibly institutionalize people sleeping on the streets. With every twist and turn, housing leaders fought to counter harmful narratives from well-funded opponents seeking to erase our vision of a future where everyone has a safe, stable place to call home.

Throughout, the Lab guided housing advocates, researchers and community leaders to create and share sharper, more compelling narratives about the housing crisis with policymakers, supporters and journalists. I believe the tumult of 2025 also marked a critical turning point for the housing field. It emerged with a new appreciation for the power of narrative — the stories that shape how people understand issues and the world. One thing is clear, the movement to ensure everyone has a stable place to live can't keep doing things the same way if it expects to change hearts and minds — and policy.

With this new recognition, our partners and allies expressed a desire for stronger, more unified messages. They want more shared stories that reach many more people to show what's possible when we all have a place to live.

“

The tumult of 2025 also marked a critical turning point for the housing field: It emerged with a new appreciation for the power of narrative.

The Housing Narrative Lab is answering that call. We are building the pathways — the narrative infrastructure, if you will — to get stories and messages out to a range of people. Specifically, pathways that connect the housing justice movement and advocacy to popular culture and media spaces, such as YouTube and podcasts.

With that, in 2025, the Lab sharpened our vision for the narrative infrastructure we need to develop across mass movements, mass media and mass culture to ensure our stories and ideas spread, get repeated and reinterpreted organically, and permeate public discussions in every space. In these pages we share snapshots of how the Lab, now in our fifth year, is not only moving toward that vision, but making a difference through our narrative research and strategic narrative frameworks, guidance and implementation.



As the leading national organization that combines research, capacity building and the power of stories to build support for housing solutions that create vibrant, healthy communities, I know our work to change public beliefs and policy about housing insecurity won't happen overnight. And so I'm deeply grateful to the Lab's partners, allies and funders for joining us, for your investment in us and for your tireless work to create a world where everyone has a home, no matter their income, race, gender or place of birth.

I look forward to moving closer to shaping that world in 2026 — together.

Thank you,

Marisol Bello

Executive Director, Housing Narrative Lab

REACHING EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE, ALL THE TIME

IMPACT:

Public Beliefs About Housing Instability and Solutions are Shifting

The Lab's mission is to shift people's beliefs about housing affordability and homelessness, in order to ultimately reform housing policies and systems. Our research shows significant changes over the last five years in what the public thinks about the country's housing challenges and what it will take to solve them:

- ▶ People who agreed that housing is a basic human need that we should ensure everyone can have, grew by 8 percent between 2021 and 2025, in our national surveys.
- ▶ Similarly, 12 percent more respondents agreed that the government should do more to solve problems and help meet people's needs.
- ▶ In 2021, 79 percent agreed that they or someone they know could one day struggle to afford a quality, stable place to live and that it's important to ensure there are programs and supportive services for those who need them. That sentiment grew to 87 percent in 2025, showing big shifts in how the public feels about housing instability and solutions to it.

BIG SHIFTS IN HOW THE PUBLIC FEELS ABOUT HOUSING INSTABILITY

+8%

INCREASE

BETWEEN 2021 AND 2025

People who agreed that housing is a basic human need that we should ensure everyone can have

+12%

**MORE RESPONDENTS
AGREE**

that the government should do more to solve problems and help meet people's needs

IN 2021 _____ IN 2025

79% → 87%

agreed that they or someone they know could one day struggle to afford a quality, stable place to live and that it's important to ensure there are programs and supportive services for those who need them

The evidence shows we can change people's minds.

Now the Lab is building the infrastructure to permeate our messages and stories through mass movements, mass media and mass culture. Here's what that looks like:

- ▶ Conducting narrative research that captures public sentiments about housing, illuminates the messages that resonate most and identifies the narratives most likely to move people to action.
- ▶ Providing the housing field the tools, guidance and expertise it needs to share effective messages and stories with broad audiences.
- ▶ Coaching the field to tell stories through popular culture and new forms of journalism and media in ways that align with modern platforms and communication approaches.
- ▶ Developing and training national networks of diverse content creators to shape and spread stories about housing affordability, insecurity and solutions.



**MASS
MOVEMENTS**



**MASS
MEDIA**



**MASS
CULTURE**

OUR RESEARCH

Delivering Groundbreaking Research to Shape Narratives

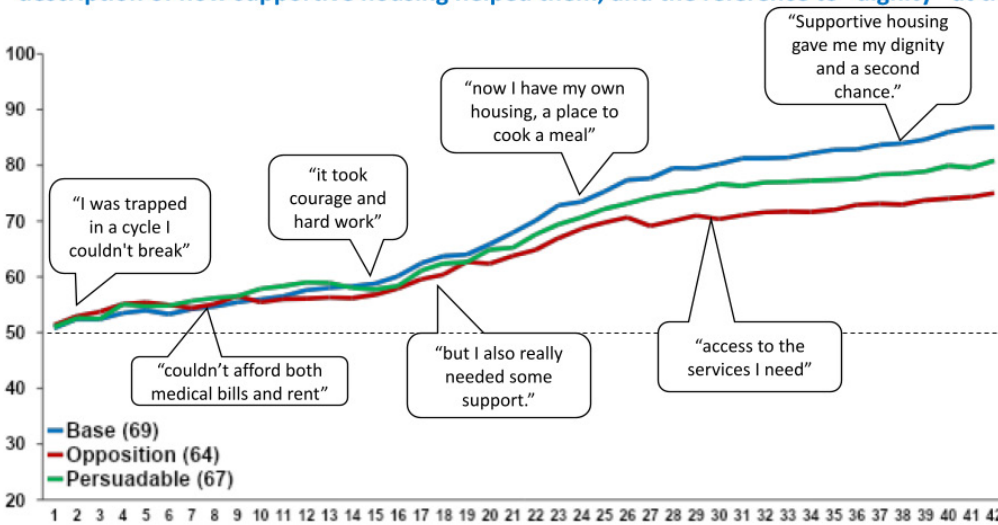
The Lab’s narrative research is the foundation of all of our work. Our expertise is informed by the research, which anchors our messaging guidance, rapid response recommendations, training and content creation.

In 2025, the Lab conducted the first-of-its-kind national narrative research about how to champion supportive housing as a primary solution to homelessness. The research was particularly timely amid an onslaught of federal action that stands to fundamentally change how we solve homelessness and provide affordable housing.

- ▶ Our study, done in partnership with the **Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH)**, gave us insight into what the public thinks about providing affordable housing plus services, such as job training and counseling, to people struggling to keep a roof over their heads. The research revealed that conservatives and independents make up a significant portion of those who believe supportive housing is a cost-effective, sustainable solution to housing instability and homelessness. Findings also showed that stories about people’s experiences with housing insecurity resonate most with the public and can shift people’s perceptions.

Personal Story

Personal Story receives mostly positive dialing – even among the opposition – among most of the message, but the start is slow. Discussion of supports that describe real live experience works best. Persuadables and base adults both steadily dial up when they hear about the courage and hard work the person put in to breaking the cycle, the description of how supportive housing helped them, and the reference to “dignity” at the end of the message.



For years, I was trapped in a cycle I couldn't break. I lost my home because I couldn't afford both medical bills and rent. I bounced between shelters and the streets. It took courage and hard work, but I also really needed some support. I'm glad I found supportive housing. Now I have my own housing, a place to cook a meal, help paying my rent, and access to the services I need. I'm working part-time, building savings, and rebuilding my life. Supportive housing gave me my dignity and a second chance.

OUR RESEARCH

- ▶ We used insights from the research to frame messaging for the field about housing and services as the primary solution to homelessness. Additionally, the narrative research informed work we conducted with the **Center on Budget and Policy Priorities**, which tapped the Lab's expertise to sharpen and develop effective housing policy narratives with a particular focus on rental assistance as a solution to housing instability.



- ▶ As the Lab's research indicates, amplifying solutions to sky-high rents and the dearth of quality, affordable housing, combined with telling stories about people's experiences, change the narrative about housing instability. Recognizing the power of stories, **JPMorganChase** worked with the Lab to create a series of stories about community-based housing innovations that are helping to increase and preserve the supply of quality housing that's affordable. This storytelling helps JPMorganChase to shift perceptions about housing solutions — such as modular and manufactured housing — that can be scaled nationally to ensure that everyone, regardless of their income, has a place to live.

“ At a time when our nation's highest government is attempting to craft a false narrative that unhoused persons are dangerous and resistant to services, the work of the Housing Narrative Lab has never been more critical. They have been our partners in crafting the messages that speak to the truth — that housing and services solves homelessness — and we rarely speak as an organization without their input.

— **Antonia Fasanelli**
Executive Director, National Homelessness Law Center

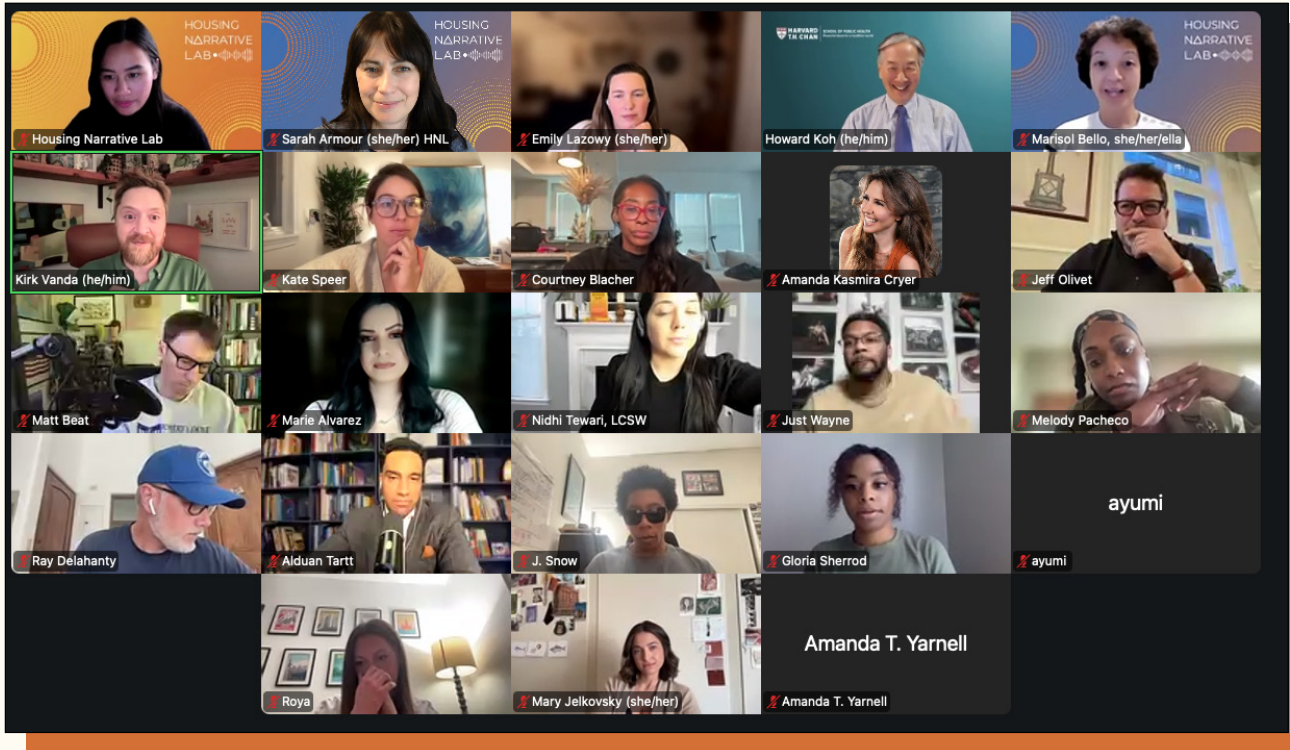
MASS CULTURE

Influencing Attitudes and Beliefs through Digital Media Storytelling

More than ever, online shows, streaming and content creators have a growing influence on American values, ideas and politics. However, housing advocates and organizations continue to aim communications at legacy media or people who already agree with them. Too few of our partners are reaching wider audiences in the places where most people today get their news, form their opinions or feel a sense of belonging.

To address this, the Lab honed our vision of the narrative infrastructure necessary to amplify solutions to housing instability and affordability in today's rapidly-changing media environment.

Here are highlights of how we began bringing that vision to life in 2025:



The Lab is training 16 content creators to tell stories about housing affordability and homelessness across Tik Tok, YouTube and Instagram.

Harvard University T.H. Chan School of Public Health and its **Center for Health Communication and Initiative on Health and Homelessness** partnered with the Lab to increase the reach and impact of diverse storytellers across Tik Tok, Instagram and YouTube. We identified 16 creators who, starting in 2026, will infuse housing affordability and access stories into content in organic, nonpartisan ways that will reach more than 8 million people. As part of our collaboration, the Lab is delivering our signature training on effective narrative approaches to housing and homelessness, sharing our latest research on persuasive messaging and putting it all into practice during interactive sessions with the creators. This project is a first step in our larger work to develop networks of content creators needed in a thriving narrative ecosystem to [shift public beliefs around housing and homelessness.](#)

MASS CULTURE

We continued our collaboration with the **New York City Fund to End Youth & Family Homelessness**, providing four deep-dive training sessions with the Fund and its grantees on how to turn advocacy into stories and advance narratives in the press and social media. We also launched a **New York City-based storytelling cohort**: Six storytellers with lived experience shared authentic stories and developed their storytelling skills through a range of formats, including social media, podcasting, photography and film. Two cohort members were invited to present remarks at nonprofit housing gala fundraisers, and storytellers continue to develop their outreach and distribution plans through events and media partnerships. For example:

- ▶ Storyteller Diamond Alegarbes' **Information and Help TikToks** are engaging thousands of followers with guidance on applying for vouchers and through sharing her experiences navigating NYC's homelessness system.
- ▶ Journalist Rodrigo Brandoa is **working on a documentary** about Red Hook, Brooklyn, and a community's fight against displacement by luxury condos and climate change that he aims to distribute through news media partnerships.
- ▶ Photographer and spoken word artist Njambi Morgan is planning to share her work at a Moth Radio Hour event, the **Brick Theater** or a public library.



The Lab trained New York City-based storytellers with lived experience how to advance their narratives in the press and social media.

POV: When you're working with content creators to advance narratives across social
How the Lab is building the infrastructure to win through a network of social creators

All National Guard Troops Sent to Washington Are Mobilized, Pentagon Says
The 800 soldiers, in need the check skills of 100 to 200, will support Washington, police and federal law enforcement officers.

Working While Homeless In America, It's All Too Common
The 800 soldiers, in need the check skills of 100 to 200, will support Washington, police and federal law enforcement officers.

What's working:

- Using plain language
- Leveraging pop culture
- Reaching new audiences
- Using authentic voices
- Smashing gatekeepers

HOUSING NARRATIVE LAB @HousingNarrativeLab

Providing Guidance for Partnering With Social Content Creators

The Lab showcased an element of our narrative infrastructure vision during the 2025 Communications Network Conference in Denver, with a poster highlighting key practices for working with content creators to advance narratives across social media.

Our poster and **related guide** sparked lots of conversation, including one that The Goodman Center, which provides storytelling training, spotlighted in its **newsletter**.

MASS MOVEMENTS MEET MASS MEDIA

Connecting the Housing Field to Wider Audiences

IMPACT: Real-Time Messaging Guidance Takes Root

The Lab's work to shift perceptions about the causes of and solutions to housing affordability and homelessness requires us to consistently seed and amplify narratives across movements, media and culture. Our partners and allies are integral to advancing those messages and stories.

To do this effectively, the Lab launched a rapid response guide in 2025 that became a go-to for local and national partners seeking recommendations on how to speak publicly about harmful federal housing policy changes. **We distributed 25 guides in 2025**, which provided tailored messaging for different audiences during breaking news moments.

And increasingly, the narrative expertise the Lab delivers is taking root.

We saw Lab-crafted messaging ripple through news articles, press releases, research reports and media interviews. We observed our partners communicating shared values and housing solutions, rather than regurgitating what's not working. We saw them tell more nuanced stories that address systemic, rather than individual, challenges that lead to housing instability.

We documented significant growth in the use of specific research-based language that the Lab suggests our partners and allies incorporate. For example:

- ▶ In 2023, the phrase everyone needs or deserves “a safe place to call home” was used in **30,000** articles, newsletters and digital sites — appearing in explanatory content or direct quotes from our partners and allies.
- ▶ In 2025, usage jumped to **67,000**, more than doubling the reach of this key phrase.
- ▶ Similarly, in 2023, the phrase “housing solves homelessness,” was only found in **77** articles, websites and posts.
- ▶ In 2025, there was a whopping 478 percent increase in uses of that exact phrase, with **445** mentions.



“a safe place
to call home”



“housing solves
homelessness”

MASS MOVEMENTS MEET MASS MEDIA

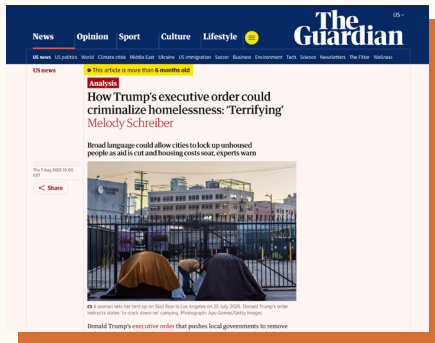
This is the infrastructure we are building at work.

Here are a few examples, with bolded phrases representing Lab messaging and recommended framing:

The Guardian

“People want housing; there’s just no housing that they can afford. But **the executive order does nothing to address the actual causes of homelessness.**”

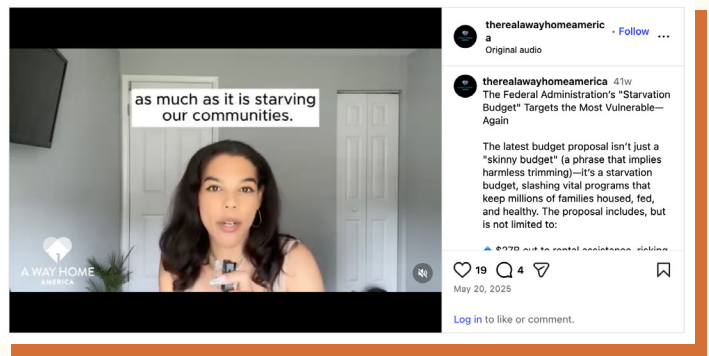
— **Jesse Rabinowitz**, Campaign and Communications Director, National Homelessness Law Center



Instagram

“The latest budget proposal isn’t just a ‘skinny budget’ (a phrase that implies harmless trimming) — it’s a **starvation budget**, slashing vital programs that keep millions of families housed, fed, and healthy.”

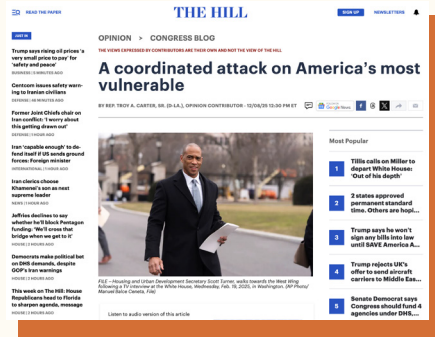
— **A Way Home America**



The Hill

“These cuts will push seniors, people with disabilities, and families back onto the streets while doing nothing to address the real driver of homelessness, which is the soaring cost of housing. Instead of investing in solutions, congressional Republicans are pushing even deeper cuts to HUD for next year.”

— **Rep. Troy A. Carter, Sr.** (D-La.)

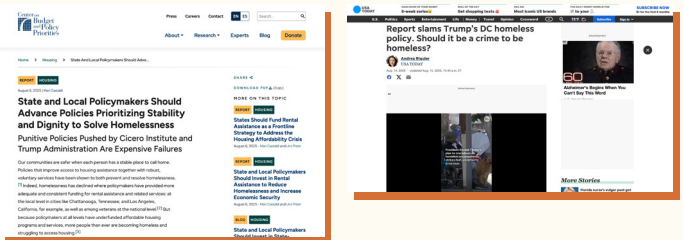


Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

“Our communities are safer when each person has a stable place to call home.”

“Homelessness is solvable. State and local policymakers can fund long-term rental assistance and enact eviction prevention, increase incomes, expand access to services that meet health-related social needs through Medicaid, and **build and preserve more affordable and supportive housing.**”

— “**State and Local Policymakers Should Advance Policies Prioritizing Stability and Dignity to Solve Homelessness**” report (Also featured in USA Today)



IMPACT: Media Coverage Reframes Homelessness As a Social Problem

In 2025, the Lab had a direct hand in the publication of more than **20 op-eds and news reports in a variety of media outlets** that framed our housing and homelessness challenges as systemic problems requiring systemic solutions.

One of those **op-eds**, from a member of Voices of Community Activists and Leaders (VOCAL) in Kentucky, shows how the Lab is shaping the narrative in local and state media by working with partners like VOCAL. By ensuring our narratives are shared across television, radio and online news, we are seeing coverage shift from describing homelessness as an individual problem to a social problem that requires communities and all levels of government to work together to address.



“ The Housing Narrative Lab takes so much of the guess work out of our communications about the housing issues of the day. I keep their guidance at my fingertips and our housing staff does too. I’m so grateful for the Lab’s expertise and patience as we learn and grow in our storytelling.

— **Peggy Bailey**
*Executive Vice President for Policy and Program Development,
Center for Budget and Policy Priorities*

IMPACT: Leaders and Advocates Drop the Jumble of Jargon

We know that to connect with wider audiences, we need to speak with them in ways they understand. In 2025, the Lab doubled down on our call for the housing field to use [plain language](#) and avoid communicating [what not to do or think](#) about housing affordability and access. Our guidance gained traction in a year of breakneck speed changes, where keeping messages simple, accessible and focused on solutions was more important than ever.

A great example of the Lab's guidance in action is how our partner Ann Oliva, CEO of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, responded to President Trump's executive order to institutionalize homeless people with disabilities and health challenges. In this [Instagram reel](#), Oliva clearly explains — without work or jargon — why the administration's approach is an “outdated solution” for addressing homelessness.



“ The Housing Narrative Lab helped me shift from reactive messaging to confidently setting the narrative by jumping on issues early. This shift has made me more direct and assertive in how I present our work and ask for support. Since then, we’ve seen more frequent sharing of our content, and I’ve had the confidence to take on more ambitious projects.”

— [Gavilán Longino](#)
Community Information Specialist, Streetlives

OUR REACH

Leading Trainings to Inspire Stories About the Importance of Home



We know that narrative work requires scale, consistency and repetition. That's why the Lab trains journalists, social media and pop culture creators, and partners in housing and other sectors to share powerful stories about the importance of a home, so that we reach everyone, everywhere, all the time. Here's a snapshot of our collaborations in 2025:

- ▶ The Lab trained nearly **7,950 people** at conferences, roundtables, summits and online in 2025. Our largest number of participants — **an estimated 5,000** — occurred during a National Homelessness Law Center and National Low-Income Housing Center webinar, where the Lab provided narrative and media training in anticipation of Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids of homeless shelters and service organizations.
- ▶ The Lab supported **22 national, state and local initiatives** with narrative messaging and strategy to shape housing solutions and block harmful policies. This included supporting work led by National Coalition for Housing Justice partners, including the National Alliance to End Homelessness, National Low Income Housing Coalition and the National Healthcare for the Homeless Council, among others.
- ▶ We also collaborated with the ACLU, Vital Strategies, Drug Policy Alliance, VOCAL and other organizations outside of the housing field whose work directly intersects with housing affordability and homelessness, to shape shared messages and narratives across our various issue areas.



7,950 PARTICIPANTS
IN LAB TRAINING

IMPACT: Narrative Research Inspires a Statewide Housing Initiative

When Minnesota housing advocates and funders wanted to change how Minnesotans think and talk about housing, they turned to the Lab. We provided the foundation for their work, partnering with the **Minnesota Housing Partnership** and the **McKnight Foundation** to conduct narrative research and create a messaging framework for the field. In 2025, advocates and funders took the next step, forming a collaborative to launch a statewide narrative housing initiative, **Minnesota Home Stories**. Using our narrative research to collect stories of Minnesotans from all walks of life, Home Stories aims to make a case for stronger, more sustained investment in homes and communities.



IMPACT: Narrative Training Builds Trust and Mobilizes Partners

When federal budget cuts threatened local homeless services in 2025, **Orange County United Way (OCUW)** knew exactly how to **turn narrative change into a mobilizing strategy**. The Lab conducted deep training with OCUW and more than 40 of its members to create shared narratives, which built trust among the groups and helped them develop the skills they would need in a crisis. When the Trump administration proposed significant funding cuts, the groups mobilized quickly to **submit more than 1,000 letters** supporting homeless services.

LOOKING AHEAD

Storytelling About the Meaning of Home

We are deeply grateful to our partners, funders, storytellers and media makers across the country who are on this journey with us. Your support, insights and creativity are integral to the impact the Housing Narrative Lab is making to change public beliefs and public policy, so that we can ensure everyone has an affordable, safe place to call home.

And we're excited about the possibilities that 2026 holds, which we will devote to sharing authentic stories about home — what it means, why it matters, how it shapes our well-being — across a diversity of media. Because we know that in our increasingly polarized world, stories have the power to connect, to strip away our divisions and inspire people to take action.

We hope you'll join us.

**PARTNER WITH
THE LAB**

to shape narratives
that make an impact.

Thank you to our philanthropic supporters and project partners for your generous support of the Housing Narrative Lab in 2025.

General Operating Funders



Partners

Corporation for Supportive Housing

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

Drug Policy Alliance

Evernorth

Funders Together for Housing Justice

Harvard University T.H. Chan
School of Public Health

Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania

Housing California

JPMorganChase

LISC/MARC Kansas City

Lived Experience Advisers

The Kelsey

Minnesota Home Stories

National Alliance to End Homelessness

National Coalition for Housing Justice

National Homelessness Law Center

National Low-Income Housing Coalition

NERSC, Inc.

NYU Langone Health

NYC Fund to End Youth & Family
Homelessness

Orange County United Way

Point Source Youth

San Diego Regional Task Force
on Homelessness

University of North Carolina –
Chapel Hill, Carolina Across 100

Urban Land Institute

Vital Strategies

VOCAL–New York