



STRATEGIC COLLECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

A WORKBOOK FOR
BUILDING SOLIDARITY
AND RESHAPING
COMMUNICATIONS



Strategic Collective Communications: A Workbook for Building Solidarity and Reshaping Communications

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Welcome,

We are stronger and our impact is greater when we work together. This sense of collectivism is written into mission statements, strategic plans, and business models. And for many, it is a driving force behind the work we set out to accomplish.

Yet, when it comes to creating a communications strategy, we often find ourselves going it alone. Decisions about which narratives to lift up are often made internally, with a hope, at best, that others are also evoking a similar, shared vision of the world to their audiences. In turn, the resulting framing and messaging produced from these narratives result in communications that focus solely on our own work, accomplishments, and accolades and not as much on our missions or shared values. Whether this is due to lack of time, money, or, even, a learned scarcity mindset fostered by the funding community, the results are the same – competition among like-minded groups and a diminished possibility of true narrative shifts.

So is this way of doing communications work actually serving us, our missions, or our communities?

Instead, imagine grounding communication strategies firmly within the values of collaboration and collectivism that are interwoven throughout our business and organizational missions. Think about the power that could be amassed if, as communicators, we prioritized coming together to discuss and organize around **Strategic Collective Narratives**, practiced **Communal Framing**, and crafted stories, built skills, and celebrated success in **Solidarity** with one another and our communities. What would happen if instead of competing for likes and press hits and influence that centers only our work, we were striving to resonate with and reverberate off one another; to lift each other up and amplify our collective voices; to rest easy knowing that our partner's success is also our success because we're all in this together?

That is the work of Strategic Collective Communications.

Strategic Collective Communications is a communications framework grounded in solidarity with community and fellow communicators. It asks practitioners to approach communications through collaboration and to build collective knowledge, practices, strategies, and strategic collective narratives with communities and partners to inform individualized communications plans and goals while working in solidarity with one another.

This workbook aims to help communicators conceptualize, create, and participate in a Strategic Collective Communications framework while simultaneously reaching their individualized communications goals. The following pages will provide instructions and insights gleaned from communications practitioners. Everything presented is fluid, and feedback is welcomed.

Only in solidarity will we build a truly resilient and just future.

What is Strategic Collective Communications?

Strategic Collective Communications is a communications framework grounded in solidarity with community and fellow communicators. It asks practitioners to approach communications through collaboration and to build collective knowledge, practices, strategies, and strategic collective narratives with communities and partners to inform individualized communications plans and goals while working in solidarity with one another.

By no means does this practice require anyone to abandon their own branding or voice. Rather, it seeks to:

- Situate the work of communicators among their colleagues and partners,
- Be a reminder that communication is not done in isolation but among a community,
- Provide an opportunity to work together to act more efficiently and have greater impact with the limited resources of time, money, and capacity available.

Elements of Strategic Collective Communications

The practice of Strategic Collective Communications is made up of three elements:

- Strategic Collective Narrative,
- Communal Framing,
- Solidarity.

Strategic Collective Narrative (SCONE)

"A narrative reflects a shared interpretation of how the world works."

- [Narrative Initiative](#)

Everyone works with a variety of narratives, consciously or unconsciously, that grounds their communications plans and helps their audience better understand the world they are working to build. Many also know (or at least assume) that partners, collaborators, and others are using similar narratives and moving toward common goals. But with a slight shift toward embracing a more collective and conscious approach in building strategy, communicators can take away some of that guess work and more easily leverage their resources to reach more people, more effectively.

Pursuing a Strategic Collective Narrative requires abandoning assumptions that partners and communities are using similar narratives and instead intentionally bringing everyone together to identify shared interpretations of how the world works and then organizing around them. Of course, these collectively identified narratives won't be exhaustive and communicators will be utilizing other narratives throughout their work as well. But by embracing the practice (and it truly is practice) of working together, communicators are provided an opportunity to exponentially expand their reach, share best practices, and increase their impact as they fight for material shifts toward the world they want to build.

There are five Strategic Collective Narratives (SCONEs) examples beginning on page 12 - Food

Access, Food and Climate, Racial Equity in the Food System, Democratizing Food Through Food Sovereignty, and Land and Water Access. These SCONEs were the result of a multi-year effort by a collective of Northeast food system communicators to discuss, attempt to articulate, and bring back to the communities for feedback some of the narratives found and utilized in the food system and beyond. Meetings were undertaken with the understanding by each organizer that everyone present was there to contribute to every aspect of the SCONE development - copy editing, seeking community feedback, and organizing - and were mutually accountable to one another.

These SCONEs offer an example of what is possible in our communications efforts, and anyone is welcome to utilize and adapt the narratives if they resonate with their work and shared interpretations of the world they are working to build. Furthermore, everyone is encouraged to join in the collective organizing taking place around them. (More information on Page 17.)

Communal Framing

"A frame is a guide. It directs people where to look, but more importantly, helps them interpret what they see. Every message — whether written, spoken, illustrated, or signed—is presented through a frame of some kind. Simply put, every communication is framed."

- [Frameworks Institute](#)

Day-to-day, communicators work with a wide variety of audiences across an ever-expanding number of platforms, often with limited access to resources. On top of that, they are pulled in many different directions, being asked to simultaneously lift up their group's accomplishments; promote programming and events; celebrate partners; and advocate for the greater worldview that their group holds. Balancing all of these needs makes the task of a communicator daunting and often undermines any well-intentioned desire to work collectively. There just isn't enough time or money.

Communal framing is a practice that attempts to strike the balance between meeting individual communications and messaging goals while also partaking in a Strategic Collective Communications effort. It aids in the creation of distinct, individualized messaging that meets the needs of each communicator's unique audiences and lifts up individual calls to actions all while layering Strategic Collective Narratives (which are created together among partners) into those messages. It is a subtle but distinctive shift in executing communications that requires intentionality and time practicing the skill.

When this practice is implemented, communicators are able to simultaneously produce individualized messaging that satisfies the litany of demands placed upon them while also actively participating in pushing a Strategic Collective Narrative in solidarity with their partners. In turn, this allows communicators to robustly participate in an ecosystem of communications and narrative strategy that reaches a much wider variety of audiences, many of whom they do not communicate with directly, while also meeting their individualized strategy goals.

In this workbook, there is a worksheet titled “Communal Framing: Moving from Narrative to Messaging.” It is designed to practice the layering of Strategic Collective Narrative into individualized messaging. When done consistently, and among organized partners who can help each other learn and grow more comfortable in the practice, it will enable communicators to accomplish internal and collective goals more effectively and efficiently.

Solidarity

Solidarity is "unity or agreement of feeling or action, especially among individuals with a common interest; mutual support within a group."

- [Oxford Languages](#)

Community relationships and trust are among the most valuable resources that communicators have to work with. They are the foundation for collaborative efforts that make it possible to utilize and celebrate collective narratives. And with audiences for any communicator only being so big, the work of shifting culture through communications is really only possible when done in solidarity with partners and communities.

This solidarity mindset, especially as applied to the practice of Strategic Collective Communications, encourages communication practices that look beyond the value of clicks, the number of press hits, or viral content. It flies in the face of ego-centered communication practices by embracing the reality that communication-related successes are intimately tied to the success of other community and partner communications efforts. In practice, this doesn't just look like organizing around Strategic Collective Narratives or working on Communal Framing, even though those are integral aspects of the work. Practicing solidarity in communications can also look like:

- **Active social listening:** This looks like following and engaging with partners and community members across communications channels, actively supporting their work and successes, and adapting to their feedback.
- **Pursuing shared metrics:** This insight can help us make strategic decisions, collectively and individually, while leveraging collective impact to secure more resources and illustrate the need for the practice of Strategic Collective Communications.
- **Following the Rule of Thirds:** When it comes to content being put out over communication channels - 1/3 personal content, 1/3 partner content, and 1/3 interesting topics that align with strategic collective narratives and individual audiences - can save an incredible amount of time while also lifting up the work of partners and creating a positive feedback loop among one another.
- **Participating in (or leading) communities of practice:** These groups serve as spaces to coordinate Strategic Collective Communications, ask for help and troubleshoot issues, find ways to further support one another, and seek out other areas of overlap.

No matter how it manifests, solidarity grounds all of the Strategic Collective Communication practices and makes organizing for a better way to communicate possible.

Operationalizing Strategic Collective Communications

Realizing the collaborative goals of practicing Strategic Collective Communications requires a three-fold approach.

First, communicators have to work with groups, organizations, businesses, and funders to continue shifting expectations of what it means to communicate. Success relies on colleagues, superiors, and those with funding resources understanding the potential value of communicating differently and collectively.

Second, communicators have to commit to working with one another frequently and consistently, while also stepping into leadership roles when possible, to create the space needed to do this work. In practice, this could look like a backbone group holding monthly meetings for communicators to gather, share resources and best practices, and collaborate; a group coming together to begin the participatory process of identifying mutually held Strategic Collective Narratives; and/or people making the sustained effort to show up and actively participate in these burgeoning spaces as best they can.

Third, communicators have to not only welcome but actively invite new voices into this work. This includes remaining conscious of and adaptive to the realities of those living in the involved communities and making sure the space and process meets the needs of everyone involved.

The work of Strategic Collective Communications can also be adapted for different industries, sectors, and issues. What is produced from these processes will almost definitely look different than what is shared in the case study below but ultimately, those working in the various industries, sectors, and issues will know what will best suit their needs.

There is no wrong way to be involved – whether it's utilizing all of the practices above or working with one practice at a time, it is going to take everyone, in all capacities, to change the way the world communicates.



Strategic Collective Communications in Practice: A Food Systems Example

How were the ideas in this workbook created?

The practice of Strategic Collective Communications as detailed in this workbook, as well as the “Communal Framing: Moving from Narrative to Messaging” worksheet on Page 10 and the Strategic Collective Narratives (SCONES) starting on Page 12, were created through the efforts of many food system communicators from throughout the Northeast.

Over the course of several years, two iterations of a core organizing team met to explore and articulate some of the narratives found and utilized in food systems work and then brought the findings back to the community for feedback. They also thought deeply about what it meant to create a practice of communications grounded in collaboration and solidarity. Emerging from this slow and intentional process were the ideas, worksheets, and other resources presented in this workbook along with five food systems-related SCONES (Strategic Collective Narratives) - Food Access, Food and Climate, Racial Equity in the Food System, Democratizing Food Through Food Sovereignty, and Land and Water Access.

Of course, most of what is shared in this workbook, including the “Communal Framing: Moving from Narrative to Messaging” can be used across any sector of work. Anyone and everyone is encouraged to adapt this to their own needs and provide feedback.

How to Read a Strategic Collective Narrative

Listed in this workbook are five food system SCONES - Food Access, Food and Climate, Racial Equity in the Food System, Democratizing Food Through Food Sovereignty, and Land and Water Access. Again, they are not exhaustive but rather capture elements of strategic collective narratives that are already in use by partners and can, should, and will be updated and adapted as they are put into practice and adjusted to real-time feedback.

Parts of a Strategic Collective Narratives

Narratives can be broken down into five parts, as shown in the graphic on the next page.

People (audiences) and Call to Actions are individualized and can vary widely from group to group. Goals, Obstacles, and Solutions are inherently collective in nature and can and should be shared among partners and communities.

Arranged around the five parts of a narrative (pictured in the graphic on the next page), each SCONES focuses on the collective elements of a narrative and is broken down into three parts - Goals, Obstacles, and Solutions.

- Goals are the future state that the group wants to collectively create.
- Obstacles are the challenges to achieving the goals.
- Solutions are the ways forward to overcome the obstacles.



Adapted from the Food Solutions New England "[A New Narrative for the New England Food System](#)" and Hattaway Communications

Listed under each part is the collectively identified framing of the SCONE. In practice, the framings listed under each part are not in any particular order and do not necessarily align with any particular framing listed under another part. Communicators are encouraged to pick and choose what framings from each SCONE resonate best with their individual audiences and call to actions they are lifting up. They then should use them as a lens to frame the content and communications they are creating. So that's to say, the language will not necessarily be used verbatim but rather the choice of words and tone in an individual's messaging will be based on their audiences.

The worksheet found on Page 10 - "Communal Framing: Moving from Narrative to Messaging" - is designed to practice the layering of Strategic Collective Narrative into individualized messaging, which when done consistently among partners, simultaneously accomplishes internal and collective goals more effectively and efficiently.

Communal Framing: Moving from Narrative to Messaging

While working more collectively within their communications plan is generally seen as a good idea, it can often be the first thing left behind when it comes to actually creating messaging. This could be for several reasons—time, money, a perceived lack of expertise in communications, or anything else. But utilizing communal framing to weave a collective narrative into messaging is not as hard as it seems, and it can become second nature with a little practice.

The following steps and worksheet is designed to practice communal framing by layering Strategic Collective Narrative into individualized messaging.

Instructions:

- Identify your audience.
- Determine your Call to Action for your audience.
- Select a collective narrative that fits with the above.
- Weave the collective narrative into your messaging.

Please note that this worksheet is for crafting a single message. But with practice and familiarity of narratives, it'll become second nature to craft such messages across a wide array of platforms.

Remember, the goal of messaging is to offer audiences a path to connect with the narratives and call to actions that are being put out into the world. And when crafted with the use of a SCONE that is being utilized by other partners, the impact of that message is increased through the ecosystem of similar narratives being put out into the world.

Following the worksheets and starting on Page 12 are the five Strategic Collective Narratives examples mentioned above.



Worksheet

Communal Framing: Moving from Narrative to Messaging

Write down an audience and a corresponding call to action for that audience.

<p>People (Audience) Who are you trying to reach? And what people reach them?</p>

<p>Call to Action What are you asking your audience to do and on what platform?</p>

From a Strategic Collective Narrative, select a Goal, Obstacle, and Solution that fits your call to action.

Narrative:

Goal	Obstacle	Solution

Weave your call to action into the narrative and have fun with it!

<p>Messaging</p>

Before moving forward, revisit your Call to Action. Has this process changed what you want to be asking your audience to do?

Example Worksheet

Communal Framing: Moving from Narrative to Messaging

Write down an audience and a corresponding call to action for that audience.

<p>People (Audience) Who are you trying to reach? And what people reach them?</p>
<p>Civically-minded people who care about intersecting issues</p>
<p>Call to Action What are you asking your audience to do and on what platform?</p>
<p>Reach your state legislature to support equitable land access policy</p>

From a Strategic Collective Narrative, select a Goal, Problem (Obstacle), and Solution that fits your call to action.

Narrative: Land and Water Access

Goal	Problem (Obstacle)	Solution
Equitable access to healthy land and waterways for sustainable growth and harvest of food for future generations	Competing, individualistic interests in land, water access, and infrastructure drive up costs and create barriers to access for farmers and fishermen, deprioritizing food production for the community	Local, state, and federal policy makes land and water more accessible and viable for community procurement of sustainable food

Weave your call to action into the narrative and have fun with it!

<p>Messaging</p>
<p>Ensuring generations of your community, no matter their background, can access the land necessary to feed themselves and their community is a crucial component to creating a healthy and equitable future, just like the need for adequate housing and a good education system. That's why comprehensive and integrated policy is necessary to ensure that all our issues - including food production - are supported. Reach out to your state legislature today.</p>

Before moving forward, revisit your Call to Action. Has this process changed what you want to be asking your audience to do?

Resources for Food System Communicators

As mentioned above, the ideas and SCONEs in this workbook were created through the efforts of many food system communicators over the course of several years. Through these efforts, infrastructure to practice and build solidarity among communicators in the food system was created and continues to be maintained to this day.

If anyone working in the food system or adjacent sectors is interested in practicing Strategic Collective Communications with others, consider incorporating the five SCONEs - Food Access, Food and Climate, Racial Equity in the Food System, Democratizing Food Through Food Sovereignty, and Land and Water Access - into work plans and strategies moving forward.

Also, the “Communal Framing: Moving from Narrative to Messaging” instructions and worksheet can help develop the practice of utilizing narrative to simultaneously accomplish internal and collective goals.

Finally, there is an open invitation to join the [Food System Communicators Community of Practice](https://foodsolutionsne.org/food-system-comms-cop/) and their monthly FoodComms Cafes which serves as a space to gather, share resources and best practices, and collaborate. Learn more and join at <https://foodsolutionsne.org/food-system-comms-cop/>.

