

NURTURING SEEDS FOR OUR FUTURE:

A Storytelling Guide for Growing New York City



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This storytelling guide is a narrative strategy tool created to help imagine and cultivate the conditions in New York City that help youth and youth workers thrive. Organizing through creative expression and storytelling, this guide hopes to bring out the stories that motivate and inspire those fighting for our collective liberation.

We have stories to tell and each story plants new seeds of the future we want to manifest in our communities, neighborhoods, schools, and businesses.

Everything we seek is already within us.

We encapsulate the truth.

ABOUT THE WRITERS

This guide was co-created by a cohort of youth, youth organizers, teaching artists and artists in New York City invested in creating a world where resources are distributed equally, and the people that build the community benefit from their labor.

Our goal is to bring stories forward that move us from existing harmful narratives to narratives that build collective cultural power and inspire new collaborations that lead to sharing resources and wealth creation.

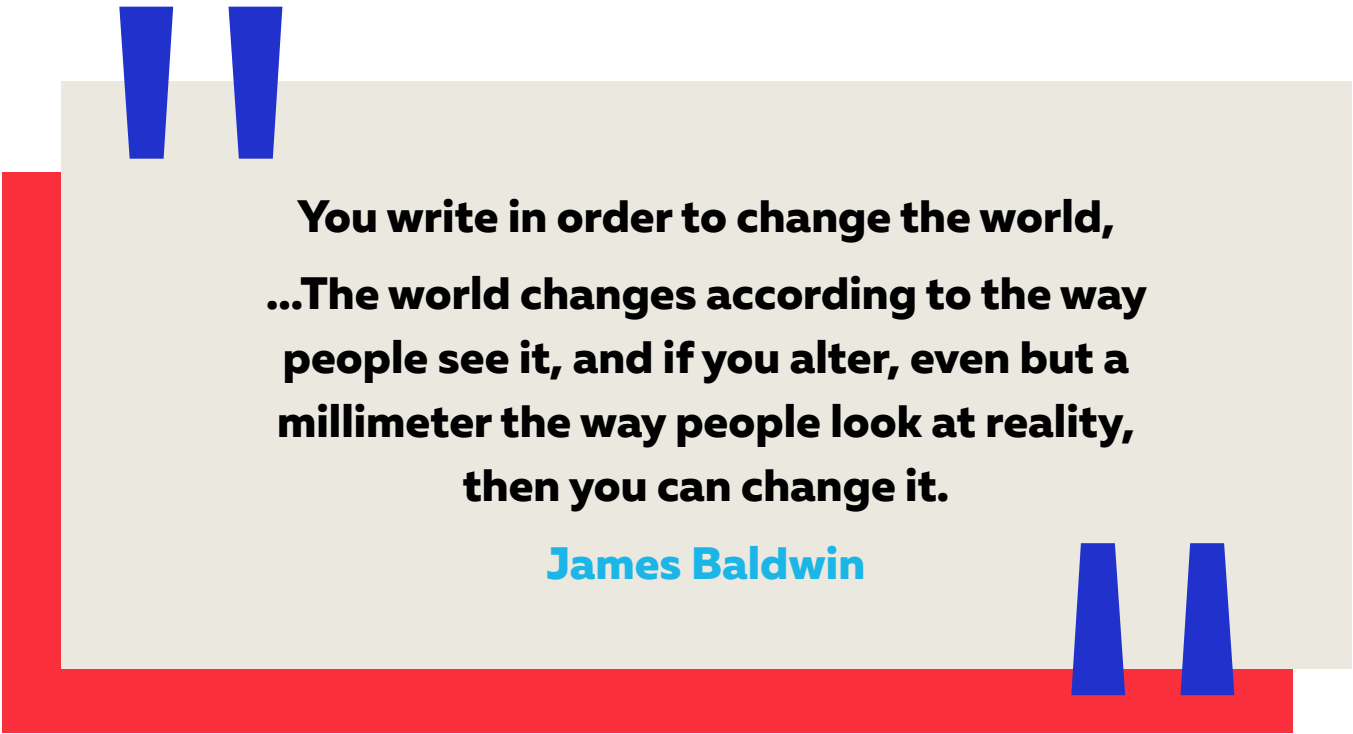


LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge the Indigenous people of New York. We pay our respects to their elders, past, present, and future. And recognize that sovereignty was never ceded, it was never given up. We also acknowledge the continued legacy of systemic racism stemming from the historic inequities of genocide and slavery, which equally require a process of truth and reconciliation in our nation.



WHY THIS CREATIVE BRIEF, WHY NOW?



**You write in order to change the world,
...The world changes according to the way
people see it, and if you alter, even but a
millimeter the way people look at reality,
then you can change it.**

James Baldwin

In the wake of a pandemic that has yet to end, New Yorkers continue to experience extreme inequities surrounding health, employment, education, and safety, disproportionately impacting communities with the lowest income. Racial inequalities fueled movements to address unjust violence against black and brown communities by the police. With the scapegoating of Asians for the cause of the COVID-19 pandemic, NBC New Asian America reported hate crimes against Asians in New York City increased by 343 percent between March 2020 to January 2022. **To combat narratives that are divisive and harmful to our communities, we need to organize and tell stories that reach everyday people struggling to live under capitalism and white supremacy.**

We organize because we choose to believe in a better future for New York City and we need more stories that help us see that future with more clarity. We need art that speaks to our

hearts, our fears, our histories, our dreams, and our future. We need art that helps us imagine the world as if it could be otherwise. We need art that uplifts the wisdom of our ancestors and inspires us to co-create the conditions needed for our youth and our communities to thrive.

WE NEED STORIES THAT NOT ONLY REVEAL OUR CHALLENGES BUT CENTER OUR JOY AND OUR LOVE.

OUR PROCESS

The Youth Organizing and Culture Change Fund (YOCCF) brought together youth, teaching artists, and artists in New York City and The Center for Cultural Power to create a powerful cohort. As part of the cohort, facilitators from The Center of Cultural Power's Artist Leadership team gathered narratives based on the lived experiences and expertise of the cohort.

Four cohort members were contracted to draft the text of this document, expanding upon the core narratives the entire group brainstormed together.

With support from YOCCF staff, brief writers received feedback from the cohort on the text twice and the design concept once prior to the copy edit. The final product was truly a collaborative effort that represents the whole cohort.

OUR AUDIENCE

Nurturing Seeds of Our Future was created for youth, artists, and youth organizers on the cutting edge of radical imagination through fresh perspectives and exercising agency by those with the biggest stake in the future.

As the primary audience of this brief, we hope that the impact of this work has lasting effects on how current and future generations organize and create with joy.

STORY THREADS: NARRATIVE PRIORITIES

Every person has a right to art, to creative expression, and to access and learn about the stories of their people.

Let's bring that art to our people, let's learn from the ways our people are already making life-affirming culture today. We need to challenge the dangerous, conservative ideas that are already taking hold in our communities.

Narrative or story threads are powerful storytelling tools for two reasons:

- Narrative threads are expansive enough for an artist to make it their own and specific enough to hold multiple stories together.
- As artists, we are constantly weaving stories about who we are, the ways we are connected, and how we build a future where we're all celebrated and invested in.



**WE HOLD EACH OTHER UP
AND KEEP US SAFE.**

**WE ARE ROOTED IN FREEDOM,
AND TOGETHER, WE ARE
DESTINED TO THRIVE.**

**WE BUILD INTERGENERATIONAL
SUCCESS.**

**WE ARE COMMITTED
TO TENDING OUR GARDENS.**



A poem by Chelsea John

There is something delicious and sweet
in the way food feels like home.

A secret that only elder hands can shape and
mold—tongue clashing against sensations,
perfectly crafted. Spices rich and ancient is
where the rubber meets the road.

Recipes shared over intimate evenings
as the world sings outside your window.

Here is where we remember the beginning.

Its origin, an oral story weaved between
generations and told over and over collecting
gifts and gems along the way.



NARRATIVE ONE

WE HOLD EACH OTHER UP AND KEEP US SAFE.

In NYC, we face systems that criminalize and deport our people, tear our families apart, and leave us in a state of fear. Survivors of both state and interpersonal violence are left isolated and hurting.

Together, we weave networks of people invested in the well-being of one another. Safety, to our communities, looks like full bellies and adequate housing. When our needs are met, we are able to show up and stand up for one another. We keep ourselves safe by cultivating loving relationships with each other. When our people are caged, we fight for their freedom. We challenge the courts and district attorneys who call us guilty without sufficient proof. We stand up to the crooked cops who cover up evidence and threaten us with impunity.

It is our duty and honor to keep us safe because we believe that we are more powerful when we come together.

VALUES

Interdependence & Community

We are stronger together. When we ask for or offer support, we are modeling a loving way of relating to each other. Interdependence is key to creating conditions in our communities for the better.

Creativity

Creativity is a muscle that we must exercise every day and everywhere in our organizing. Creativity helps us imagine the world we want to live in and helps us reach and engage our communities effectively.

Protagonism

We are the ones we have been waiting for. Our movements are leaderful—not leaderless. Protagonism teaches us that we are all capable agents of change in society and that our role is to develop that protagonism in others.

Organization/Structure

Sustaining our work, ourselves and our communities takes commitment to organization and structure. To organize at scale, we need to build a vibrant movement ecosystem that helps us share resources and wealth.

NEXT STEPS

What strategic stories can advance this narrative?

WE NEED STORIES THAT REFLECT SOLIDARITY ACROSS OUR VARIOUS COMMUNITIES IN NYC.

Stories of mutual aid, interdependence, and collective power building.
Stories of us protecting our collective interests and keeping one another safe, regardless of what respective communities we come from.

What are examples of this narrative in action?

[Click the text to open links](#)

FREE TRACY MCCARTER

The history of participatory defense campaigns led by incarcerated people and their families and community is long and varied. With her leadership and the efforts of organizers from Survived & Punished NY, Tracy McCarter was able to win her freedom and clear her name!

"I STILL BELIEVE IN OUR CITY" PUBLIC ART CAMPAIGN

Created by Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya, "I Still Believe in Our City" affirms that Black lives matter, and that East and Southeast Asians refuse to be vilified or denigrated. No matter what comes our way. New Yorkers don't succumb to cynicism or defeat. We choose to believe in and fight for ourselves, our home, and our shared future.



Ubuntu

I am because you are

We are because you were

And we can't see where we're going without
generations before us standing like
beacons of love and light along the way

Sankofa

NARRATIVE TWO

WE ARE ROOTED IN FREEDOM, AND TOGETHER, WE ARE DESTINED TO THRIVE.

New York City grew from the idea of freedom, but increased systemic inequities have hindered the city from being in full bloom.

Living in a constant state of survival ensures that we never have the capacity to think beyond the next day. It is impossible to think outside of the status quo when that reality is actively killing you. Only without the constant stress of how we survive, can we imagine how we thrive.

We are human and we all have the birthright of pursuing life with joy. We were born to be free from a culture of austerity and build a community with a foundation of abundance, love, and mutual support.

VALUES

Solidarity

Our power relies upon us, both as individuals and as components of our collective community. Only by holding strong to each other can we effectively become greater than the forces seeking to continue oppressing us.

Love

Caring, compassion, growth, accountability—all these things work together to create a revolution based on love, that truly seeks our collective liberation by ensuring that our most vulnerable never have their needs unmet. Our collective love for each other is a discipline that in practice creates resiliency, strength, and ultimately – joy.

Abundance

To live in abundance is to reject a mindset of scarcity and see true wealth in the well-being of your community. Abundance is having what you need, what fulfills you, and sharing that with your community.

Joy

Joy is a source of life, and we prioritize and value joy as essential as water to our growing movements. Joy allows us to acknowledge our blessings expressed in gratitude, love, and celebration.

NEXT STEPS

What strategic stories can advance this narrative?

STORIES THAT DEMONSTRATE A COMMUNITY COMING TOGETHER TO FULFILL ITS NEEDS NOT BEING MET BY THE GOVERNMENT.

Stories of individuals finding joy and power in working with their neighbors.
Stories of self-awareness and gratitude.


What are examples of this narrative in action?

[Click the text to open links](#)

PLANNING WITH SOVEREIGNTY AND MUTUAL AID: A SOCIAL CARTOGRAPHY OF CORONA, QUEENS


Using Roosevelt Avenue in Queens as a branching spine into the neighborhoods of Jackson Heights, Elmhurst, and Corona, the project will take place in the multiple pockets of neighborhood plazas and underutilized lots.

A temporary installation will display a series of oral histories that will transform and activate Roosevelt Avenue into a collective urban archive. By listening, responding, and engaging with the interviews and theme, participants will be able to tie individual narratives to the histories of activism, social justice, and care within their urban spaces.



Sometimes we must move blindly
Forcefully
With sureness
Steadfast into the beyond
To find our tomorrow
Sometimes we must dig deep and remember
That better sometimes feels cold and treacherous

Soft warm heavy hands
Rubbing and affirming



NARRATIVE THREE

WE BUILD INTERGENERATIONAL SUCCESS.

NYC has a legacy of Intergenerational success, a promise and commitment linking generations and ideologies.

It is our responsibility to collectively shape our liberated futures, acknowledging that the work done by those before us is carried on, uplifted, and ushered forward by those who will come after us. As revolutionaries, this is critical to our why.

Why do we continue to fight for the tomorrow we dream of while knowing we may not experience the fruit of this labor? It grounds us, pulls the scope of our existence out wide, and shows us that we are not working in service to one another but rather in tandem. The ways in which we exist are dependent on our love and faith in one another.

VALUES

Mutual accountability

To truly exist in community with one another we must lean in in times of joy, in times of pain, and all the moments in between. Our freedom is intimately engrained in one another, and it is a sacred oath that transcends generations and moments and pushes us to take our collective wisdom and wield it responsibly.

Faith

It takes deep faith in the seeds we sow to know our work is not in vain and it will be uplifted and carried on by those who come after us. Our responsibility lies in building strong foundations, raising generations under us, and trusting the work of those done before us.

Abundance

To live in abundance is to reject a mindset of scarcity and see true wealth in the well-being of your community. Abundance is having what you need, what fulfills you, and sharing that with your community.

NEXT STEPS

What strategic stories can advance this narrative?

STORIES OF INTERGENERATIONAL COMMUNITY BUILDING.

The sharing of knowledge for the collective gain. Stories that connect elders with youth. Stories that honor the wisdom and work of our ancestors.

What are examples of this narrative in action?

[Click the text to open links](#)

BLACK ARCHIVES.CO

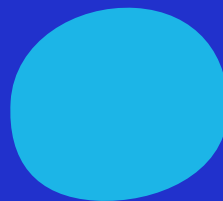
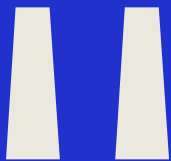
Founded in 2015, by Renata Cherlise, Black Archives is a multimedia platform that brings a spotlight to the Black experience. Through an evolving visual exploration, Black Archives provides a dynamic accessibility to a Black past, present, and future.

THE GENERATION PROJECT

The Generations Project is a place for LGBTQ+ to meet and connect across all generations and backgrounds, to share and preserve our history, and to tell our stories in our own voices. By revitalizing the oral tradition, we create opportunities for in-person gatherings and community-building, ensure the handing down of LGBTQ+ experiences to future generations, and uplift marginalized voices.

Sometimes we witness brief glimpses
of what a future can offer
It lives in the visions of our children
And their children
And is held together by the things
we can't always understand
A beautiful melting pot of knowledge
Hope bubbling in the pits

Brewing up.



NARRATIVE FOUR

WE ARE COMMITTED TO TENDING OUR GARDENS.

We are both the garden and the gardeners. We are the legacy of gentle, nurturing hands and the planters of the next crop.

We cannot forget how far our work has come or let the weight of what still remains stifle our spirits. With connections to deep roots of the past, we have the agency to cultivate our sprouting selves and till the earth to prepare for what will come next—because it will come.

Yes, there is a struggle. Droughts of inspiration overwrought soil of burnout and floods of expectations. And there is song and dancing and art. There are community meals and bear hugs and laughter. And there is victory.

We must choose to practice hope so that the fruit we bear is sweet rather than bitter. It is about shaping our understanding of the present and being grounded in reality without letting it weigh us down.

VALUES

Growth

Growing is a continuum and how we develop is dependent on our own choices. In choosing to center our community and our personal health, we seek light and joy in a way that draws others to us and helps us grow individually and as a collective.

Perseverance

Perseverance is the ability to keep going in the face of adversity, challenges, and failure. We must be like water: able to shift when necessary while always working to forge our own path.

Interdependence & Community

We are stronger together. When we ask for or offer support, we are modeling a loving way of relating to each other. Interdependence is key to creating conditions in our communities for the better.

NEXT STEPS

What strategic stories can advance this narrative?

STORIES OF LONGEVITY IN MOVEMENT SPACES AND CENTERING ART AND JOY.

Stories centered on teaching community and connection through collective creation. Stories of taking care of ourselves, our communities, and natural ecosystems. Stories of community gardens and urban farming.

What are examples of this narrative in action?

[Click the text to open links](#)

RED HOOK INITIATIVE

Red Hook Initiative is a community organization based in Brooklyn that focuses on youth development and training. Red Hook Farms is a program of RHI that works to teach youth through action about food justice and actively provides food security for the neighborhood itself.

WHO WE ARE



ABOUT THE CENTER FOR CULTURAL POWER

The Center for Cultural Power is a womxn of color, artist-led nonprofit nonpartisan organization, inspiring artists and culture makers to imagine a world where power is distributed equitably and where we live in harmony with nature. We create intersectional stories and content addressing issues of migration, climate, gender, and racial justice. Igniting change at the intersection of art, culture, and social justice. The Center for Cultural Power organizes BIPOC artists and culture makers to use their creative practice to shift worldviews from domination to collaboration and interdependence.

OUR APPROACH: CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

Narrative threads are throughlines – that weave together a constellation of stories. They contain worldviews, public sentiment, and dreams for a bold future where each of us radically belongs. Narrative threads help unify a collective message that artists want to tell in our fight to create a sustainable and just world. Having a unified message helps shape culture and policy. The origins of any narrative are vast and complex, often formed over generations. So narrative strategy is a way to coalesce and tell the key stories about our people and communities – that shift mindset and reveal a world we have not yet seen but know is possible.

Narratives are introduced and widely spread through the artistic craft, cultural practice, and radical imagination of BIPOC cultural workers and artists. Thus, the Center for Cultural Power's approach is to support and center the BIPOC artists whose powerful and authentic storytelling changes people's underlying assumptions and beliefs – and builds power for our communities to create change.



ABOUT YOUTH ORGANIZING AND CULTURE CHANGE FUND

Youth Organizing and Culture Change Fund recognizes that the most profound positive changes in our society are rooted in the legacy of community organizing and cultural production working together towards the same goals. YOCCF partners with young community and cultural leaders, artists, funders, and narrative changemakers and provides relationships and resources to advance their vision for change, while building and scaling their power together.

GRATITUDE

This guide has been made possible with the incredible generosity and wisdom of the following organizations and people:

The Youth Organizing and Cultural Change Fund Cohort whose brilliant vision and work inspired this guide: [Committee Against Anti Asian Violence](#), [DreamYard](#), [DRUM – Desis Rising Up & Moving](#), [El Puente](#), [Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project](#), [Groundswell NYC](#), [Make the Road New York](#), [Sistas & Brothas United](#), and [The Brotherhood Sister Sol](#).

We offer particular gratitude to the cohort's Creative Brief writers who developed the values and narratives that are the foundation upon which this guide was built:

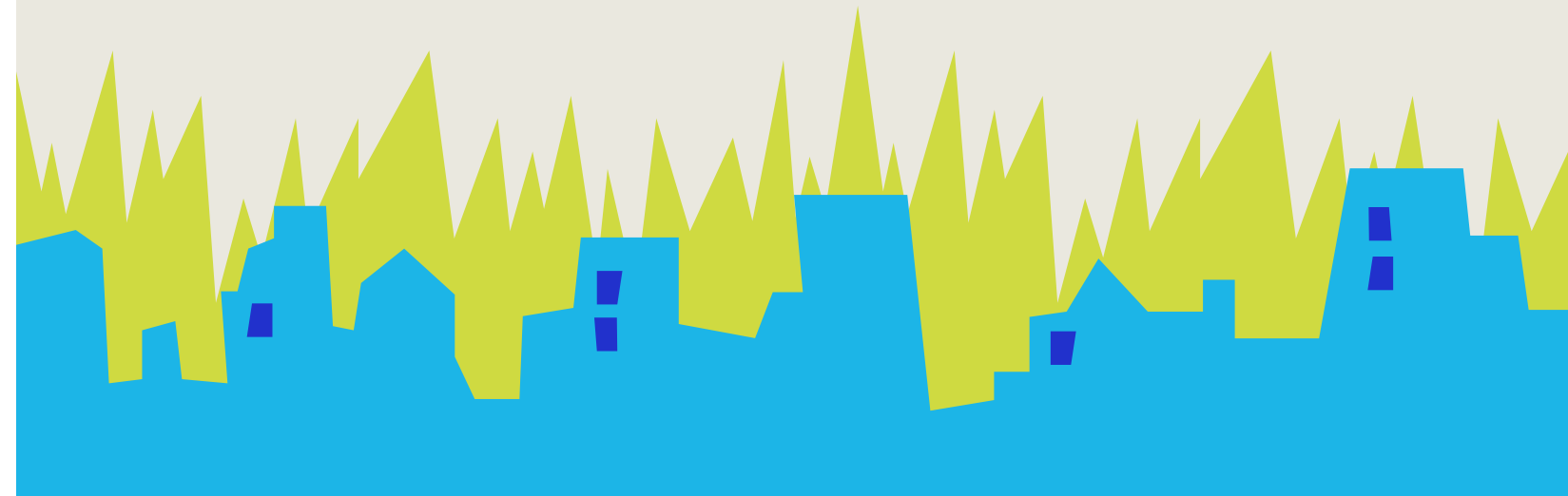
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Appendix

A Poem by Chelsea John

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