



“It Just Makes Us
More Powerful”

A Participatory Evaluation of the
Housing Justice Narrative Fellowship

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It is with joy that I share this report with you, which was only made possible because of the many people who were generous with their time, thoughts, and virtual space. Documenting the Housing Justice Narrative Fellowship process was exploratory like the Fellowship itself. The Evaluation-Learning team was composed of mostly Fellows, including Brook Fadley, Mandee Seeley, Donna Price, Kea Mathis, Nzingha Masani-Manuel, Joelle Craft, Tahira Ahmad, Michelle Thurston, and Erin Meechan, who helped craft interview questions with the larger group, conducted one-on-one interviews with peers, and analyzed interview transcripts to identify and reflect on themes presented in this report. Community Change's Housing Justice Team has been patient and supportive in this in-depth evaluation process.

Throughout the Fellowship, I experienced the excitement of getting to know partners across the country, the laughter and tears, the support and safe space these workshops afforded, the vulnerability of trying new approaches, and most of all, the relationship-building that many Fellows recount in their assessments of the Fellowship. Although I joined the fellowship as an observer, more than once, I was honored to facilitate breakout groups and helped with curriculum development and agenda planning. This experience – being part of the Fellowships' planning, implementation, and evaluation process – allowed us to use learnings in real time and modify and respond to the changing needs of fellows.

I am most grateful to the Evaluation-Learning team, mentioned above. I also cannot overstate my gratitude and appreciation for the Housing Justice Team. Thank you to Michael Anderson, Katy Heins, Cesar Hernandez, and former Staff Chris Genese and Marisol Bello, as well as Tyson Jackson and Kayla Gilchrist who joined Community Change at the end of the Fellowship. Thank you to Mikka Kei Macdonald, Cristina Rayas, and Gloria Chan for helping with the report design and visual storytelling components. Kathy Mor, thank you for your consistent support with Zoom, for mailing interview participation gift cards, and ensuring care packages reached our doorsteps throughout the Fellowship, which made us feel more connected. Thank you to Maya Simpkins for superb line edits. Thank you to Allegra Baider (former Staff) for being among the first to see the benefits of a process evaluation like this one, in order to step back, reflect, and dream even bigger. I believe our findings report demonstrates the power of investing in the leadership of grassroots leaders not only because they produce creative results but also because their personal growth is an impactful and necessary part of sustainable change.



Jennifer E. Cossyleon, PhD

Introduction

Too often, innovative research sits dormant on shelves and electronic databases and never reaches the hands of people who could put it to good use. The **2021 Housing Justice Narrative (HJN) Fellowship** sought to do something different. The Fellowship brought together directly impacted community members to make meaning of research findings and employ key recommendations. The main goal of this process was to mobilize and intensify a base of supporters to address racial inequity in housing policy and advance an agenda for homes for all. The Fellowship brought about many results ranging from community actions to media appearances to housing conference presentations and updated organizing recruitment scripts, all of which incorporated research-backed messaging and narrative strategy. But perhaps the most important result is one that cannot be quantified. At the end of the Fellowship, participants described personal growth. They overwhelmingly felt better equipped to work toward creating an inclusive housing system for everyone. The title of this report comes from a resounding theme shared by Fellows “It just makes us more powerful.” This report shares the key ingredients of a process that Fellows describe as intensifying their own power and confidence to do their everyday organizing work.

A total of 24 leaders and organizers completed the Fellowship, joining virtually from California, Colorado, Louisiana, Oregon, Washington, and Michigan, many of whom have experienced housing instability and homelessness (Appendix A for a list of participants). For nine months, these Fellows engaged in an exploratory process to 1) understand and apply the Housing Justice Narrative research to advance housing campaigns and 2) use key research findings to organize and expand the base of housing justice supporters.

The report begins with a brief overview of the Housing Justice Narrative (HJN) Research Initiative and the origins of the HJN Fellowship. The next three sections focus on the evaluation findings, which draw from participant observations and one-on-one interviews with Fellows (see Appendix B for methodology notes).

First, we point to the essential Fellowship culture and curriculum. Among these include the intentionality of community-building, basics on narrative framing, and two key practical tools, the Message Box and the Story of Self. Next, we document how Fellows responded to the HJN Initiative findings in tandem with how they put main research findings into action within local organizing campaigns. We end with recommendations crafted with Fellows, which include both must-haves for future fellowships and a wish list for future efforts to advance a bold housing justice narrative.

Background

The Housing Justice Narrative Research (HJN) Initiative is a collaboration between Community Change, Race Forward, and PolicyLink that expands on the Race-Class Narrative Project. Through mixed methods research, the HJN Initiative identifies a narrative strategy to increase the intensity of support for housing issues (see research summary). Drawing from language analysis of conversations around housing, in-person focus groups, and online dial surveys conducted in 2019 and 2020, key research findings are threefold: First, America is ready for a national conversation on housing and sees housing as a top issue the government needs to act on. Second, the public sees housing as a basic human need that our society is not meeting. Third, people want to see themselves in the story, and want to see action. The research also uncovers two main challenges. The first is that most people see housing as a commodity, which interferes with the goal of housing as a basic human need for everyone. The second challenge is that people are confused about how our housing crisis went so wrong and what we need to do to fix it.

Based on these findings, the HJN Initiative recommendations encourage housing leaders and organizers to create messages that center race and people with lived experience, offer bold solutions, uplift widely held and deeply felt values, and connect housing to a broader set of issues. Putting these strategies into action will arguably increase the intensity of support for housing justice solutions. The goal is for supporters to see housing as a basic human need everyone deserves, breaking through the housing commodity frame (where housing is focused on profit instead of people).

Launching the Fellowship

Housing Justice Narrative Initiative partners shared their research findings with organizing groups across the country via Zoom, and uploaded these recorded presentations on housingnarrative.org. During these share-outs, grassroots leaders expressed their desire to learn more about how key findings could be applied in local organizing campaigns. Thus, to put Initiative research and recommendations into action and increase the capacity of directly impacted leaders to shape narratives around housing, Community Change launched the Housing Justice Narrative Fellowship.

Community Change's Housing Justice team identified community partners and invited them to participate in the Fellowship. Partners were either members of state-wide resident organizing networks or organizers and leaders with grassroots power-building organizations. These leaders and organizers were actively engaged in housing organizing campaigns that matter most to tenants, including creating and maintaining affordable housing and tenant's rights. Community Change staff (hereafter, Staff) invited partners to complete a short interest form and to participate in an informational phone call to learn more about the process and nine-month time commitment.[1] After this phone call, all who expressed interest were invited to join the Fellowship cohort.

As noted in Table 1, the Fellowship was split into three interconnected phases (See Appendix C for an overview of the schedule). Fellows who participated in an unpaid capacity within their organizations (leaders) received a stipend of \$599 and had access to a technology fund to provide or upgrade equipment required for full participation in the Fellowship. In total, Staff purchased 8 laptops, a printer, a tablet, and a headset for participant leaders. All Fellows were eligible for up to \$75 a month for internet costs, and stipends for child

[1] The interest form asked about personal skills the applicant was willing to share, organizing experiences, participation outcome goals for the fellowship, comfortability using Zoom and other platforms, and general address and payment delivery information. This form also asked about applicant's childcare, language interpretation, and technology needs.

care during Fellowship meetings were made available. Geographical cohorts could also apply for up to \$20,000 in funds to help cover the cost of community actions that uplifted the HJN messaging. Staff invited cohorts to share a budget proposal, where groups described the action, how it implemented HJN strategies, and how it advanced a transformative housing justice narrative.

Table 1. Housing Justice Narrative Fellowship at a Glance

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
<p>Dissect the main findings of the narrative research and consider how the HJN strategy could be implemented within movement actions, campaigns, and base building activities.</p>	<p>Develop plans and field actions where groups set specific goals and strategies to put the HJN research strategy into action.</p> <p>Fellows gathered within their state cohorts, between meetings, to plan actions and attend optional deep-dive training workshops.</p>	<p>Share lessons learned from implementation and discuss how learnings could be shared with the broader organizing field.</p>
Meeting Frequency		
<p>Twice a week for four weeks.</p>	<p>Every three weeks for nine weeks.</p>	<p>Five meetings within a ten-week period.</p>

Findings

Essential Culture and Curriculum

Upbeat music welcomed participants as they entered the first Fellowship virtual meeting room. It was January 21, 2021, the day after the Inauguration of President Biden. With wide smiles, Staff greeted participants by name as they joined, asking Fellows to share their name, preferred pronouns, organization, and location in the chat. The first meeting modeled a general layout for the group's time together each week: music, small group ice breaker conversations, and a review of group agreements before diving into interactive workshops or breakout discussions, usually ending with time for individual journaling of reflections. Fellowship meetings always incorporated short breaks and/or stretching between activities.

Building Community

Fellows noticed, appreciated, and readily engaged in Staff's intentionality around creating spaces for community-building. These spaces fostered the development of Fellows' confidence in themselves, their voice, and their perceived ability to effect change. The following quotes offer a glimpse at how Fellows and Staff described community-building throughout their time together and what it meant to them to connect in this way.

“My favorite thing is how we all love on each other and lift each other up.”

Donna, Detroit Affordable Housing Task Force

“We are building a community of support so that people don't have to carry this alone.”

Victor, United for a New Economy (UNE)

“The whole concept of fellowship we are all working on one thing... but we are all going towards something. You feel that support, that kinship, that empowerment from other people, it makes a huge difference.”

Michelle, Residents Organized for Change (ROC)

“It's truly inspiring to be surrounded by others who share your passion for the work.”

Mandee, ROC

“[I'm] enlightened, empowered and very happy that I met a bunch of people who are fighting for the same cause.”

Cynthia, HousingNOLA

“We are learning about narratives but we are also building a community. Especially now when the pandemic is happening [it's] beautiful we are still able to find ways to be there with each other and connect with each other.”

Cesar, Staff

This section offers a set of key ingredients that helped to create this community-building environment throughout the Fellowship, mainly from the perspective of Fellows.

Ice Breakers. Within each fellowship meeting, Staff incorporated time for informal conversations among all participants. The first icebreaker conversation for the Fellowship invited Fellows and Staff to state their hopes for the new year, their housing justice visions and values, and share something about themselves, including a superhero dream or favorite food or television show. Staff mixed groups at random. As a participant-observer, I joined one group, listening in and engaging as Fellows shared with one another.

Jazmin, with Residents United Network (RUN), said she felt “a glimmer of hope” and described the moment as an “exciting time” with “more momentum” for housing. This was the year, according to Jazmin, where “people who are most affected, need to get first access to funds.” Idalia, also with RUN, echoed the need for policy change. “Small changes at the local level can make a bigger impact at the state level,” said Idalia.

This icebreaker offers an example of the optimism participants brought with them at the start of the Fellowship and their willingness to connect. Leaning into sharing more about themselves, leaders discussed how the global pandemic created an increased need to care for themselves, take much-

needed breaks, and set boundaries to be more present with their children and families. Some wellness strategies included journaling, physical activity, watching cooking shows, and indulging in Mexican romantic comedies. There were plenty of chuckles-- muted and unmuted, head nods, and like most breakout groups, this one ended with



Housing Justice Fellows Gather Virtually.
Image Description: Screenshot of a Zoom meeting (twelve people pictured).

participants talking until the last second before being redirected to the main virtual meeting room. Once together in a large group again, someone might jokingly say “And that’s how you solve our housing crisis,” or “don’t tell so and so what I just said about them,” and inescapably, “how did that go by so fast?” From the start, there was a keen appetite to connect, share, and build together.

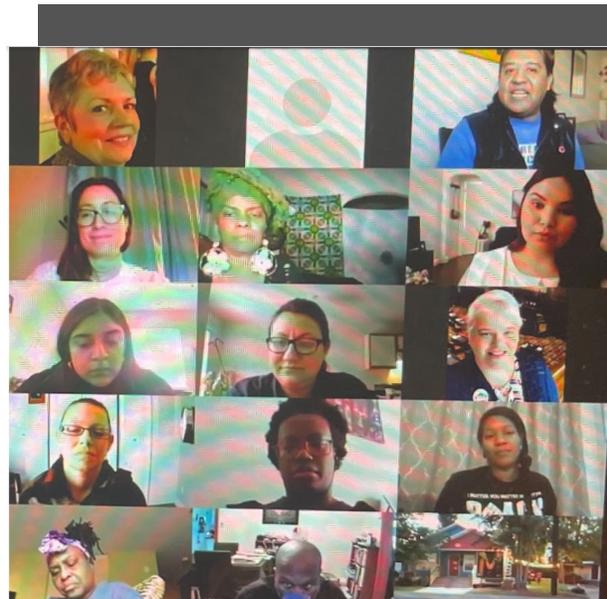
Group Agreements. The first Fellowship meeting also established the practice of setting and adding to Fellowship group agreements. The final group agreement list, which was displayed at the start of each subsequent Fellowship meeting, included the following mutual expectations:

- Step up, step back
- Do what you can to minimize distractions
- Take care of yourself - OK to take break from being on video, or step away - do what you need to do
- Use a group ‘parking lot’ to hold on to ideas
- OK to disagree. Debate opinions, not person
- Validate others! Culture of validation
- There are no wrong questions
- Enough. Let’s Move On (ELMO)

- Create space for grounding at the end of each day
- Effective listening
- Encourage one another
- HAVE FUN!!!! (Emphasis in original)

These agreements encouraged Fellows to step out of their comfort zones, create space for others to do the same, and be guided by a set of shared expectations to help meet the personal and collaborative needs of the group. From the start, Fellows agreed they wanted to create a space for support and encouragement, a place where they could freely ask questions, debate, listen, and be heard. Recognizing that some topics would arise they could not fully explore and some they would eventually have to move on from, the group agreed to use a “parking lot” for future conversations. The combination of these group agreements set the tone for the Fellowship as a constructive and lively space of learning, joy, and growth. Returning to these agreements at the start of each meeting served as an effective reminder.

Small-Group Work. Breakout sessions during the Fellowship were relaxed and conversational, always guided by questions to consider and or a worksheet to collaboratively complete. Within these smaller virtual rooms, Fellows had the opportunity to connect before sharing their thoughts with the larger group, allowing participants to collect their words in a more intimate setting. The following are several breakout-group prompts, followed by a few responses shared by Fellows. When possible direct quotes are used and cited.



Housing Justice Fellows Gather Virtually.
Image Description: Screenshot of a Zoom meeting (fifteen people pictured).

- **Who do we do this [housing] work for?**

- Restaurant workers and baristas losing jobs during COVID (unknown)
- “This is the reason why. I am trying to develop leaders of the new generation. He is the reason why I do this.” - Luz, 9to5 (referring to her grandson on screen)
- “Going through the process of being homeless to getting housing and knowing the struggles that I personally went through... It was difficult and scary. Then I started watching my neighbors going through these issues, and that’s what sparked it for me... The seniors of my community, helping them.” - Michelle, Residents Organized for Change (ROC)
- Our ancestors. “Every single one of your hundreds [of] ancestors fought to survive so that you can be alive today.” - Victor, United for a New Economy (UNE)

- **What are the dominant narratives around housing and homelessness in our local communities [that we want to change]?**

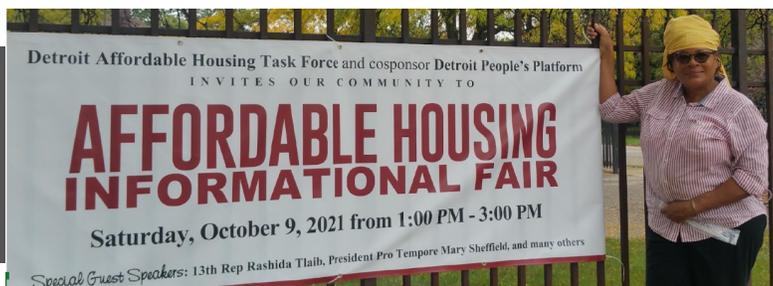
- Housing is a commodity (several participants)
- “Raising the corporate tax rate [will] drive business out of California. I say BS. There is a lot that we can be doing!” -Iris, Housing California
- If you work hard enough you should be able to afford housing (several participants)
- “We hear a lot of narratives about supporting rent relief INSTEAD of renter protections, so we have to make clear you need BOTH to be effective.” -Erin, Washington CAN (emphasis in original)

• Who is our base?

- Base are directly impacted people (several participants)
- Single mothers with low incomes would be our base.” -Brenda, 9to5
- “Majority Black Detroit is our base, people who are willing to get out there and fight for the things that Detroit needs and has to have.” - Bomani, Detroit Affordable Housing Task Force
- “[People] that support not only our values but they actually act. They sign a petition, or they make a phone call, for the cause that we present to them. That’s important to remember when we are thinking about base”. - Kea, Detroit People’s Platform
- “I am also very concerned [about] undocumented folks who are part of our economy in Gresham [and] are not getting any support! As workers and renters.” -Erin, ROC

• Who is our opposition?

- Usually people in power and the ones that are not living the issue, especially the ones that are profiting from people.” -Idalia, RUN
- “The mayor and county [who] have overtaxed homeowners by 600 million dollars and foreclosed on people who were overtaxed.” -Tahira, Detroit Affordable Housing Task Force
- “The banks/corps will let those houses ROT before they work with families to keep their homes. There are tons of vacant homes in my hometown just sitting there, rotting away.” -Joelle, Washington CAN (emphasis in original)



Fellow Nzingha Massani-Manuel poses for a photograph before the Affordable Housing Informational Fair, October, 2021. Image Description: Fellow Nzingha Massani-Manuel stands with a banner that says "Affordable Housing Informational Fair."

• Who are our persuadables?

- The people that we really need to persuade would be the council people, the mayor, that's a hard reach, but we can work [on] him. Our congresspeople.” -Donna, Detroit Affordable Housing Task Force
- “I live in a small town where everybody knows everybody, developers, wealthy community, law enforcement.” - Mandee, ROC
- “I’m not gonna worry about the audience who says one plus one equals six. That's wasted time, that's wasted space, wasted breath. Let's work with the people that we know [and can persuade] and give them the information that... they wanna know too” -Michelle, ROC
- “It’s okay to alienate our opposition. We should be focusing [on how] the narrative is leading with our values and solution and vision. We can shift persuadables.” - Isaac, Washington CAN

These excerpts offer a snapshot of how Fellows engaged with one another. Their words highlight who was top of mind during a difficult pandemic year as they worked on housing justice priorities, how the group worked through which dominant messages they wanted to push back against, and their initial reasoning around who made up their base, opposition, and persuadable groups they could recruit to support housing justice policy change[2]. As Fellows shared these sentiments within small groups and in larger share-back spaces, it was common for participants to interact on-screen with finger snaps (a sign of a resonating message) or to type chat messages that agreed with or applauded the person sharing (i.e., +++1, Yes!), and to frequently display thumbs up emojis or hearts. On one occasion, ten participants shared an ice-cream emoji to show support for someone’s persistent craving. The fellowship was a lively space with consistent interactions throughout.

Image created by HJN Fellow Mary Zhou for a campaign to extend the eviction moratorium. Pictured is Duaa-Rahemaah, an organizer with the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance



[2] Staff created a [Glossary of terms](#) adapting findings from research.

Care Packages. Staff put thought into creating three care packages for all group members. In Phase 1, Fellows received a HJN Fellowship notebook, a coloring book with markers, a Community Change mug and pen, a Togolese cloth face mask, sweet and salty snacks with tea and coffee, and a \$50 gift card for ordering food to celebrate the end of the first phase. In Phase 2, Fellows received a Community Change shirt, more snacks, a Togolese cloth face mask, and a book (Guerilla Art Kit) to spark ideas about community actions. In Phase 3, Fellowship participants received a HJN t-shirt designed in part by Fellows, a Community Change “fanny pack,” another \$50 meal gift card for a group celebration, and a certificate of completion.

Overall, the Fellowship created a space of community and trust, which Fellows described as an important achievement. The following quotes are additional words shared by Fellows and Staff on community-building.

"It's so nice to get to know Colorado fellows more and keep working together on this campaign."

Jazmin, Housing
California

"I hope that what you are feeling today...is a sense of community and sense of place, where not only are you learning but that you are growing in your own power. I want to honor you for struggling with this, because that in itself is part of our growth. If we are not uncomfortable, we don't move."

Cesar, Staff

"[I feel] motivated and in community"

Jazmin, Housing
California

"When I was first sharing, I was terrified [of] being judged. I was concerned that my self-esteem could not handle that and it would crush me even more... I often keep my voice shut and hidden because sometimes I feel like I will be judged. Then you realize you are not alone; you are part of a new community."

Michelle, ROC

Exploring the Role of Narrative in Building Power

“Cross racial solidarity, shared prosperity, racial justice and a government that works for all of us. That’s our formula for our narrative.”

Michael, Staff

Before diving into the HJN research findings, the group discussed narrative and its role in building power. This was an essential part of the curriculum because it focused on establishing shared understandings of terms and making meaning of how people could be mobilized with thoughtfully crafted messages that shift core narratives.

What is a Narrative?

“The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you alter, even by a millimeter, the way people look at reality, then you can change it.”

- James Baldwin

Staff spent a considerable amount of time discussing the importance of narratives, and in particular, reviewing and defining “dominant narrative” and “transformative narrative.” A narrative is “the collection of stories we tell ourselves that make sense in the world around us,” explains Michael (Staff) during the first Fellowship meeting. Several meetings later, Marisol (Staff) echoes Michael, defining a narrative as a “system of stories that are related and provide a framework for how we think about things,” including history and current events.

Staff discussed the connections between narratives and collective action. They shared slides with images of people marching together, displaying community power and solidarity. In one photograph, a young girl is walking while holding up a sign that reads: “we are human.” In the same photograph, a

woman pushes a stroller alongside her. In another image, the focus turns to three older women who hold up “families belong together” signs while an American flag flies in the wind behind them. “When we structure narrative in a way that builds people up, it can unlock action,” explains Michael as a handful of participants take notes, nodding their heads in agreement.

Staff explained the importance of narrative within movements, including immigration movements (“We Belong Here” and “Keep Families Together”) and LGBTQ movements (“Love is Love”). Staff described how direct actions can impact narratives, citing examples of an HIV crisis direct action or “Die-In” outside of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) office. In this case, direct action focused on the consequences of inaction: the death of loved ones, coupled with a solution for government investment in treatment and prevention. A common thread among these narratives was an emphasis on people, families, and love – all resonant themes that move and inspire people. These narratives all contest dehumanization and hate by appealing to connectedness, affection, and belonging, components that tend to be absent from dominant messages that blame people for structural issues.

A dominant narrative is a “pervasive and problematic” message that housing justice advocates and stakeholders work against and unfortunately sometimes reproduce (See [The Narrative Pyramid Analysis Tool](#), 2020). Staff encouraged Fellows to explain these terms in their own words. Jessica from 9to5, stated a dominant narrative is a “widely accepted belief, which doesn’t mean it’s true... think of it as a stereotype”. Meghan from Together Colorado added that a dominant narrative often “blames the individual” and “includes dog whistles” or seemingly innocent statements that are coded political messages that imply harmful stereotypes of racism or hatred. Someone in the chat said a dominant narrative can lead to the “madness we saw on Jan 6 and over the last four years,” referring to the 2021 Capitol insurrection and Trump era policy harms.

Dominant narratives can spread misinformation and divide and blame groups, often harming the most marginalized people. Next are a few examples of dominant narratives Fellows adamantly disagreed with but were prevalent within their communities:

“That any rental protections are going to force landlords to sell their properties and make housing more expensive”

Erin M, ROC

“People who are unhoused are there because they want to, or because they don’t put enough effort to get themselves out of that situation.”

Jazmin, RUN

“[People who are homeless] could be in the shelter or do something different.”

Meghan, Together Colorado

“A lot of people have become homeless because they have been overtaxed. The narrative is that they did that to themselves, they’re on drugs. To change that we tell the story of how people got homeless, which would change the narrative.”

Tahira, Detroit Affordable Housing Task Force

During a one-on-one interview, Kea from Detroit People’s Platform said the dominant narrative was purposeful. In the following quote, Kea expands on this sentiment:

I believe it's used as a tool... That's why it's a dominant narrative. I believe that it's used as a tool to keep people separate in silos, and to keep people pointing fingers at others. It allows our society to set up an othering mentality, where we believe that it's the others. If the others would just work harder, the others would get a job. If the others would get off of their butts and work.... Unless you're involved... in groups like this one, Housing Justice Narrative, or other groups that say, “Hold on, let's look at the system.” They just automatically say, “Oh, no, it's you.” Yeah, that's the dominant narrative, and it's very hurtful for our society.

Here, Kea points to the need for a systemic analysis that seeks to understand the root causes of issues and moves away from the dominant narrative, which tends to individualize systems-level problems. Kea recognizes the Fellowship as one part of the solution to dismantling these messages.

In line with Kea, other Fellows criticized the common sentiment of blame towards people facing housing insecurity and homelessness. Meghan shared her frustration: “there are not enough beds [in shelters],” and going to a shelter “increases their risk of COVID.” Meghan said we need messages that humanize circumstances that are often beyond people’s control. Duaa-Rahemah from the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance said we need “change [in messaging] from personal responsibility to institutional.” Bomani also added the need to move away from judging people based on material possessions: “There’s nothing special about people who have millions of dollars, and nothing wrong with people who don’t!” Similarly, Victor suggested we must shift from the gravely inaccurate belief that “poor people are lazy, uneducated, unworthy, dirty” and “rich people are educated, hard-working, innovative, worthy, and clean.”

Conversely, a main goal is to turn dominant narratives into transformative narratives. “The decommodification of housing is a transformative narrative. [Housing] is an essential human need, not something that people should have to pay for,” said Chris (Staff) using language directly from the Initiative research findings. When asked to share, Jessica, from 9to5, defines a transformative narrative as a message that “would help to bring people into the movement to create the change we want to create.”

Fellows struggled with the definitions of dominant and transformative narratives. Staff picked up on this quickly by being attentive to the chat and discussions in the breakout groups. Staff responded by revisiting and unpacking the definitions, pointing Fellows to the group glossary, creating virtual polls to assess their understanding of the terms, and brainstormed different language to explain the distinction between a dominant narrative (e.g. “lies,” “harmful message,” “what it is”) and a transformative narrative (e.g., “truths,” “caring message,” “what it needs to be”). Further, Cesar (Staff) offered a creative solution to engage fellows in a popular education exercise, “a la

Augusto Boal,” a Brazilian theater director known for the Theater of the Oppressed (influenced by Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed). Excitedly, Cesar suggested Fellows could act out the dominant narrative, and then another group could jump to the scene and change it to what the scene should be if it were transformative. The group appreciated this idea, although logistically and virtually it would be difficult to accomplish. Nonetheless, these examples show Staffs’ dedication to responding to the needs and questions of Fellows and adjusting agendas as necessary instead of steadfastly moving forward with initial curriculum plans. Throughout, Staff sought input from Fellows, including short surveys to collect information about the types of skills Fellows were most interested in learning (i.e., Story of Self, pitching to the media, art and activism, conducting power analysis), and used survey responses to plan optional curriculum accordingly.

Framing, Message Box, and Story of Self

“I just think of myself before this fellowship, and I think coming up against somebody telling me about their experience, about them and why things will never change and why [they can’t] change anything, like I think I would’ve had more difficulty being able to sit down and talk them through their own power or the framing of the issue or things like that. And so, this fellowship definitely allowed me to have those deep conversations with members too.”

Jessica, 9to5

Like Jessica, just quoted, Fellows highlighted curriculum they deemed essential to the Fellowship. Among this curriculum included learning about how and why message framing is effective and workshopping practical tools they could use to draft and organize winning messages, (i.e., Message Box and Story of Self).

Framing. Framing is a term used by cognitive linguists and social movement scholars to describe how people construct and make meaning of the world around them. Professor Stephen Reese describes frames as “...organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world.... Frames [impose] a pattern on the social world” (p. 11).[3] Message framing is the presentation of an issue and or solution, often with a particular goal in mind. During a Fellowship

meeting, Michael (Staff) displayed an image of a large crew ship, indicating the ship represented a unified voice. The crew of people on the ship had a common goal of moving in the same direction. But in order to reach this unified voice, messengers must consistently and deliberately frame issues in a way that moves people and shape understanding. For example, many people can relate to the importance of caring for the most vulnerable, fairness, home, and stability that moves people and shape understanding.

Done with persistence, framing creates openings for people to relearn things that have become second nature based on the messages they have heard and their social interactions and experiences. To help the Fellows with the concept of framing, Michael shared the example of how the groupings of stars that in the United States are commonly known as the Big Dipper are known as the Big Bear in Russia and the Plough in Ireland, who focus instead on the larger constellation. Although the stars are the same, how we understand and define those stars comes from information we have been taught, including our culture, language, and experiences. The charge for leaders wanting to change the narrative around housing then, is to frame issues in a way that points to the solution and resonates with widespread values, “They don’t need to know more about what is wrong” said Michael, but rather to see and hear the values they care about and which get them to pursue the solutions this crisis demands.

Message Box. Overwhelmingly, Fellows like Nzingha quoted below described the Message Box as a helpful tool for organizing their thoughts and phrases (See Appendix D for the tool).

“I love the message box. And I will use that forever. That's an excellent strategy and tool...it just helps you to get right to the crux of an issue... without a lot of fluff. And I think that's really important because especially in our work, we are so time limited.”

Nzingha, Detroit Affordable Housing Task Force

[3] Reese, S. (2001). Framing public life: A bridging model for media research. In S. Reese, O. Gandy, & A. Grant (Eds.), Framing public life (pp. 7–31). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Adapted by Staff, the tool includes a box with four embedded triangles, each designed to help users incorporate four parts of a message: vision, problem, solution, and values. Staff urged Fellows to focus on leading with values from the research that are widely held and deeply felt. The Message Box is a tool to “craft an invitation” for others to join the housing justice movement, explained Cesar (Staff). The narrative would plant a seed to help grow the movement. In the following quote, Cesar expands further:

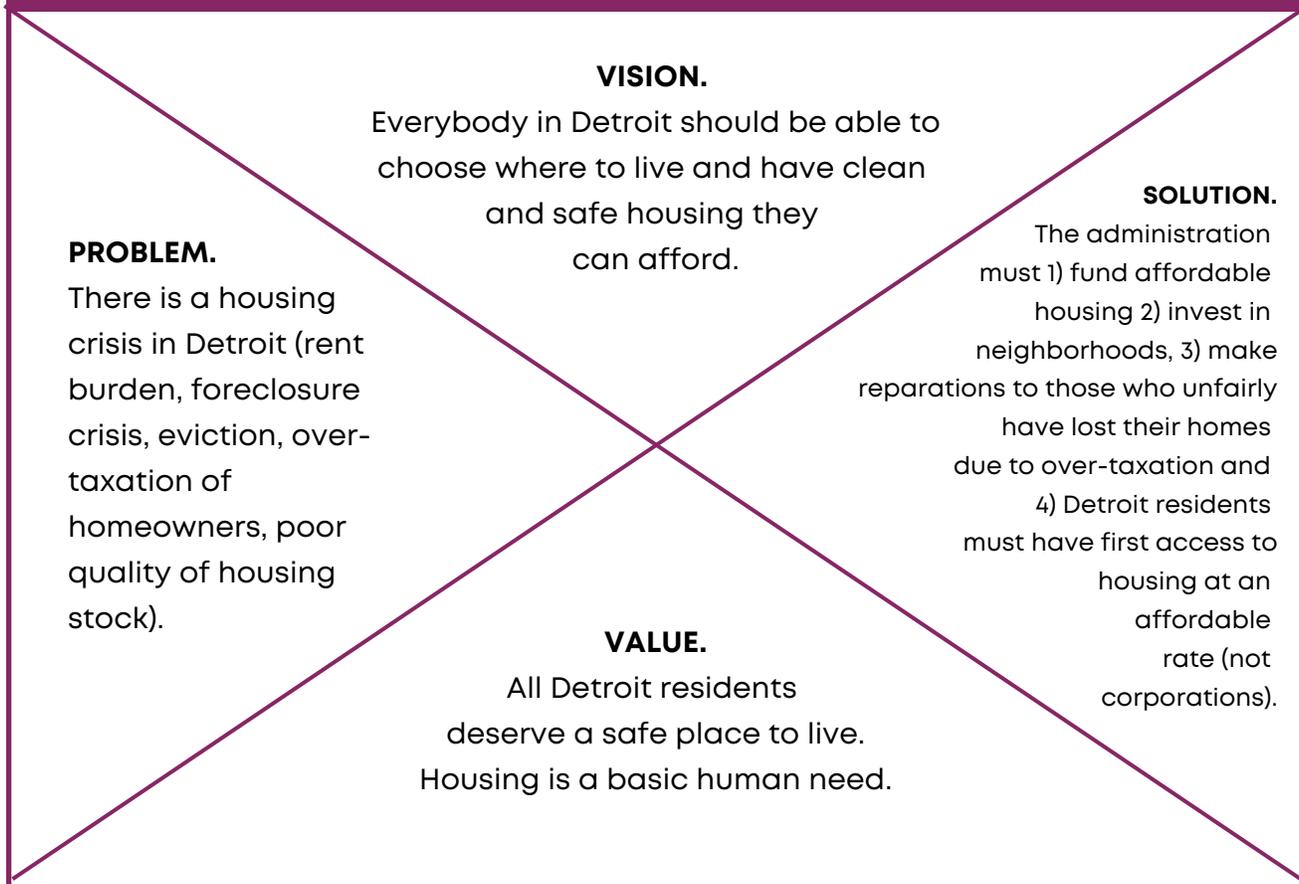
When you want people to join you, what do you tell them? How does that message fit into this box? How does it have a vision, solution, problem statement, and value that we know works? The ones we are asking you to adapt are the values that we know work with our base and our persuadables [based on the research]. How do you take those messages and make them specific to your community?

With this charge, local and state cohort groups worked to fill in their Message Box over several sessions.

The Detroit group for example, used the tool to brainstorm a range of problems, solutions, collective vision, and underpinning values (See Figure 1). Although the group quickly aligned on their vision and value statement, they had a harder time pinpointing a singular problem and solution, given the magnitude of the housing crisis and the needed response. For example, the “problem” section at first included the “white media,” dominant culture, people who owned all of the wealth in Detroit, and policymakers. Katy (Staff) asked the group a couple of clarifying questions: “Is the media what causes you to not have homes or does it perpetuate the dominant narrative?” “Well, the policymakers are in cahoots with the media,” replied Bomani. “When we are thinking about the problem, who can solve our problem?” Katy pressed.

The conversation evolved to the need to build a grassroots movement in Detroit that would change the leadership. Katy suggested the group could focus on “how to get your message out” to people with voting power in Detroit. By the end of the exercise, the Detroit group had used this tool to name each component as concisely as possible based on their group conversation.

Figure 1. Detroit, MI Message Box Example



The Message Box facilitated a starting point for drafting widely accepted messages. Bomani said the Message Box exercise reminded him of in-person meetings, where groups “put little posters on the walls,” came back together, and shared ideas from the brainstorm. Other reactions from Fellows were similarly encouraging. “We can use that for “Bring CA Home!” said Maria, from RUN, referring to a coalition dedicated to eradicating homelessness in California. “I’m going to use the Message Box for a video I’m sending to the National Conference on Ending Homelessness this weekend,” shared Mandee from ROC. During a one-on-one interview, Mandee said, “it’s really helpful to have that [Message Box] tool to be able to put those messages together in certain ways to be most effective.” Erin, also from ROC, mentioned a meeting where the tool came in handy: “I got to lead my group of fellows into a meeting with local senators and representatives, and used [our] Message Box, the

vision, the problem, solution, and the values,” she recalled. RUN, referring to a coalition dedicated to eradicating homelessness in California. “I’m going to use the Message Box for a video I’m sending to the National Conference on Ending Homelessness this weekend,” shared Mandee from ROC. During a one-on-one interview, Mandee said, “it’s really helpful to have that [Message Box] tool to be able to put those messages together in certain ways to be most effective.”

Story of Self. Similar to the Message Box, Fellows appreciated working on a practical tool to connect their personal story to a larger housing justice movement. The Story of Self tool helped Fellows outline their personal story “in a short period of time, which is a challenge” admitted Yvonne from the Detroit Affordable Housing Task Force. In the following quote, Brook from RAP describes the impact of the Story of Self on her leadership development:

The story of self has allowed me to grow....I've taken the lead in legislative work, I've been a part of panels, telling my story and helping other people, and hopefully inspiring other people to tell their stories... I've grown in embracing all of me as a human being, and allowing that, allowing my humaneness to kind of lead the way for me, so I can help others embrace their humaneness and become leaders themselves.

Brook, like other Fellows, emphasized wanting to shed light on the human side of housing issues guided by the Story of Self exercise. As Lavearn from RUN and Tavares from HousingLOUISIANA said, this is a process of “finding your own narrative” and “talking truth to power” to make the movement stronger.

Staff tailored Story of Self prompts created by organizer and scholar Marshall Ganz and many organizers throughout the years.[4] They shared the tool with the entire group and offered two optional in-depth workshops to practice and receive feedback on their Story of Self. Over half of the Fellows attended the workshop.

The icebreaker for this session included the following prompts: “What is your favorite story? What do you like about that story? And what makes it compelling for you? Once Fellows returned from their breakout groups, Katy (Staff) suggested that a good story includes a challenge, a choice, and an

outcome. Highlighting the power of stories, Katy asked the group to remember their six-year-old self sitting in a library or classroom in anticipation of hearing a story. The group discussed the sensory aspects that pull you into a story and connect you to the storyteller. Katy asked someone to read the following quote from Marshall Ganz: “Movements have narratives. They tell stories because they are not just about rearranging economics and politics. They also rearrange meaning. And they’re not just about redistributing the goods. They’re about figuring out what is good.” Figuring out what is good and valued is arguably derived from a process of personal experience and making meaning of those experiences.

Cesar (Staff) shared a short story of being in a store with his grandmother when he was very young, translating for her for the first time. “Instead of being ashamed [of speaking Spanish], I saw the power in speaking two languages. I realized that day I needed to be bilingual for the survival of my family. At least I spoke two languages, and I could run,” said Cesar with a big smile. Cesar asked the group: “where do our values come from? When we think about our beliefs, where do they come from?” “Our past, our faith, [our] traditions” replied Donna. “Your family,” “your peers,” “your generation,” “your past experiences,” others chimed in. In the following quote, Cesar explains the benefits of including value statements in the movement stories we tell:

When we include these values in these stories, it allows us to see ourselves in other people’s stories. Over the past couple of weeks, you all have been learning a lot about Housing Justice Narrative values... As we think about our stories and our Story of Self, think about the values you want to be sure to come out [in your story].”

Staff explained that each of us has a story that can move people to action. When we incorporate values into our stories, our audience attaches emotion that can turn into action toward our housing justice goals.

Through this exercise leaders and organizers shared stories of losing their homes due to foreclosure, renting from “slumlords,” living in shelters, and couch surfing. They described the messages they heard regarding the payoffs of

[4] Marshall Ganz and New Organizing Institute 2016 https://new.ccea-nv.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Participant_GuideMarenJohnson.pdf

working hard, only to lose so much so quickly. They talked of domestic violence, moving 24 times, and turning “pain and trauma” into community organizing for something better for themselves and others. Overwhelmingly the group spoke of home as safety, security, and stability, something they did not always have but intended to continue to work to achieve for all.

Putting the Housing Justice Narrative Research into Action

“When we think about messages, let's think about building power”

Katy, Staff

“Folks that created this research, are experts in research, but the work of putting it into our campaigns, the work of being organizers, that's us. This fellowship is about that exciting process of [putting] research into practice.”

Michael, Staff

“We are trying to figure out how to challenge those lies that are out there with our truths. That's what we are trying to do. And when we do that we can build power.”

Cesar, Staff

Staff described the Fellowship as an opportunity for learning, action, and building power. Using a well-known saying within community organizing, Chris (Staff) explained how the research would assist organizers “to meet people where they are at” and to take “an honest look” at what values resonate most with our base of community members. “Most people are not radical housing organizers. This research gives us a good window into... how to mobilize and intensify the support of our base.” This important work could not happen without leaders and organizers on the ground. Leaders across the country living in different communities, both urban and rural, would work to “plow and cultivate together” to “reach the most fruitful impact,” declared Michael (Staff).

After an overview of the origins of the HJN Initiative, its core research methods, and timeline, Staff turned to the main learnings of the research. These include the following takeaways:

1. People recognize housing is a top issue and they want the government to respond.
2. The public sees housing as a basic human need and are well aware there is a housing crisis, including homelessness and the high cost of housing.
3. A primary challenge around increasing the intensity of support for bold housing solutions is that most people see housing as a commodity, which interferes with the goal of housing as a basic human need for all.
4. Another challenge is most people are confused about how our housing crisis went wrong and what we need to do to fix it.

To break through the dominant narrative of housing as a commodity and increase the intensity of support, **Staff presented the following research recommendations based on the Initiative research findings:**

- 1 Center race and current racial inequity.**
- 2 Lead with lived experience;** our most effective messengers are people speaking about their lives and the people they love.
- 3 Go bold!** Solution-oriented campaigns motivate people.
- 4 Inspire people by using values** that are widely held and deeply felt.
- 5 Connect housing to broader issues** in order to build a cohesive, relatable narrative.

Staff shared sample messaging that tested favorably with study participants, including:

- All children deserve a roof over their head and a safe place to live
- Like air to breathe and food to eat, safe shelter is a basic human need
- Everyone deserves to have a safe, stable place to call home, no matter what they look like or where they come from
- We need policies that ensure housing is within reach for everyone

The following sections dive into each of the five Initiative research findings / recommendations. We focus on how Fellows responded to the strategy in group discussions, and how some Fellows have implemented the recommendations within their ongoing organizing work and campaigns. It is important to note that Fellows described the ongoing implementation of similar messaging research before learning about the Housing Justice Narrative Initiative findings, albeit not necessarily as a combined narrative strategy. A handful of Fellows had also attended workshops on previous Race and Class Narrative research findings.

Center Race

The Initiative research recommends that messages center race and current racial discrimination, as opposed to focusing on past discrimination. Overall, Fellows agreed on the need to talk about varying forms of racism. Fellows struggled with the recommendation to focus on current racism, which some interpreted as overlooking long-term racial harm, including the results of the “welfare queen” and the “rich white guy... on stolen land” narratives. Daphine from RUN described the existence of “systemic racism, community racism, and political racism” and suggested, “people are in denial because they have not had [a] transparent conversation about racism.” Daphine suggested that groups who have benefited from racism “have to take responsibility” for its effect. Gina, for instance, mentioned the harmful practice of racial redlining in Seattle, which today mainly benefits developers and “millennials.” Gina also pointed out the layers of racial-ethnic identification that she did not see reflected enough in the research. For example, Gina explained she wanted to learn more about how messages from the HJN Initiative specifically tested with Native Americans.

Through one-on-one interviews, we learned how local context shaped the Fellows’ responses around centering race in messaging. While some Fellows said they have routinely centered race in messaging, others have faced pushback. For example, Kea mentions race as a key part of messaging in Detroit and frequently points to the implications of racism. In messaging and conversations with community members, Kea reminds people how billions of dollars in public money have not reached Black people in Detroit. This “is why

[we] say majority Black Detroit matters!” Said Kea. In her organizing work, Kea said she routinely points out how race impacts eviction and wealth outcomes in Detroit, citing a recent study that indicates that over the past ten years, white income increased 60 percent, while Black wealth only increased 8 percent[5].

Lived Experience

Fellows overwhelmingly agreed the best messengers are people with lived experience. Staff explained how those closest to the problem have a stronger voice than economists or policymakers alone. Real-life stories from people who have been “through it” are important, and the HJN research suggests that the public wants to see themselves in the narrative. Donna agreed that “sharing stories helps” and highlighted the importance of tailoring one’s story to your audience as an important skill to practice and teach. Donna saw this process as putting “faces to the issues, instead of just something on paper” and mentioned her appreciation for the Fellowship for creating the space to practice drafting, telling your story, and receiving feedback.

During a small group discussion, Geno from Build Baton Rouge shared how during the fight for Obamacare, he kept hearing false messages about how “people who were affected by [being uninsured] were too lazy to get jobs.” In response to this narrative, he shared the story of his mom, a college-educated woman who ended up on long-term disability due to back problems and was subsequently let go from her job because she could not work. “Reminding people that...it's about real-life issues that anybody can face,” is important, Geno told the group. These kinds of stories offered Fellows ideas about the types of information they could share with others to show the prevalence of housing insecurity.

Iris from Housing California shared how RUN members, coalition partners, and Fellows collaborated on talking points for a state bill and used examples of lived experience to strengthen their message. The proposed legislation would

[5] <https://detroitfuturecity.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/The-State-of-Economic-Equity-in-Detroit.pdf>

take a portion of the money saved from prison closures in California and try to funnel at least a portion of it towards housing for those who have been recently incarcerated (AB328). For Iris, the application of the Fellowship “really struck [her].” Fellows “were instrumental in helping to draft some of the messaging and they pulled from their own stories, and they pulled from stories of people that they knew.” Together, they were able to draft messages for social media and talking points to increase support. Iris was impressed with how leaders helped draft messages “in very visceral practical terms,” which contrasts messages that are often “very wonky,” she said. “We need to create messages that the everyday person can grasp in a matter of seconds, and that’s where RUN members...having gone through or going through this fellowship, were able to articulate,” said Iris. Here Iris illustrates the importance of applying Fellowship learnings to create messages that, in addition to humanizing the policy issue at hand, also potentially move people’s emotions and willingness to act.

During a one-on-one interview, Mande, with ROC shared her most memorable moment when she realized the power of telling her story. In the following quote, Mande explains in her own words:

During one of the small Oregon cohort meetings...something came up that I don’t usually talk about, which involved my children during our tent living days and I think everyone in the group had tears in their eyes. And at that moment, I knew that that was the story I needed to tell at some point. Those moments that are the hardest to talk about are the ones that we need to share because they bring out emotions in others. Especially when you’re talking about kids. And my dream is to be a writer, so I’ll carry that moment with me whenever I feel nervous about sharing something that hurts with other people because it needs to be shared for a shift in narrative to happen.

Mande’s reflection reminds us that sharing lived experiences with others can be difficult and painful, requiring adequate support during these vulnerable moments. Although sharing stories of lived experience may, as Tina from Habitat for Humanity Lafayette, said “pull at the heartstrings” of our audience, we must center the wellbeing of our messenger, who may retell often triggering experiences.

And last, Fellows grappled with a discussion regarding the influence of the messenger's perceived racial identity. Maria from RUN asserted, "[People] have to believe it can happen to them; what if this was your family?" she asked rhetorically. "We are gonna bring in white suburban homeless to tell their story," said Maria, noting how people she encountered "aren't listening to people of color." Within a small group discussion, Maria asserted that people of every race face homelessness, "it's not a race thing," she said because it impacted all races. Erin from Washington CAN replied, "it's still important to point out, communities of color are more likely to be impacted by this." This exchange offers one example of how Fellows grappled with the need to recognize how experiences of homelessness impact people across race and place and highlight how homelessness disproportionately affects Black, brown, and immigrant people given their already marginalized social position in society.

Offer Bold Solutions

The research indicates resonating messages focus on the larger solution or vision, and less on the villain, the issue, or the process that led to the issue. Marisol (Former Staff, Communications) said during a session: "As advocates, we like to talk about the problems of how we got there. Messages that resonate [are] messages that start with what we are starting to achieve and what we want versus the negative frame and the problem." While Fellows engaged in crafting messages focused on bold solutions, some of their visions included:

- Seeing children safely playing outside in green spaces
- Ending homelessness
- Substantial investments in safe, accessible, and affordable homes
- Investments in housing trust funds
- Eviction protections and the right to counsel in court proceedings; and
- An extension of the pandemic eviction moratorium

Fellows agreed "band-aid" fixes were an inadequate response in favor of bold long-term solutions. "The system needs surgery, not a Band-Aid," said Donna. Nonetheless, Fellows raised an issue with moving attention away from "the villain" or those who benefit from housing inequity. The reactions of Fellows in this section are similar to their concerns around focusing on current racism instead of historical racism, as mentioned earlier. In the following quote, Iris shares some of her initial concerns:

My mind wanders towards thinking about [those that] aren't suffering from housing insecurity and are taking advantage of a system that favors them...they have been living and perpetuating a system that is benefiting them and not other people.

Fellows throughout their time together named a host of organizing targets and “villains,” including greedy corporations, developers, and unresponsive landlords and property managers. Fellows were accustomed to naming a community organizing villain, in some cases starting campaigns around spreading awareness of their harmful wrongdoings. The HJN Initiative suggests naming the villain or the problem only briefly, which is a critical piece of undoing the mis-education and dominant narrative around housing and deservingness. We can recall that “the problem” is one part of the message box tool Staff adapted to assist Fellows in crafting messages. Nonetheless, this excerpt highlights some of the struggles Fellows had with quickly moving on from those who benefit and reproduce housing inequity.

Lead With Values

The call to lead with values-based messaging landed well with Fellows, particularly the practice of framing a place to live holistically and centering children. As Iris shared:

The way that we relate [to others] is on the basis of values...I'd say definitely I've seen our RUN members and myself really begin to internalize the use of those message[s], leading with value-based statements to help people immediately relate and then, we begin to guide them towards solutions we know that work.

During a small group share out, Michelle urged Fellows to “say what we want and put emotion into it.” “Kids are a part of our community, it's our collective responsibility, and we want every Oregonian to thrive,” said Michelle, before stating that her group was excited to start working on their narrative.

Nonetheless there was hesitation from some Fellows around whether these messages alone would increase the intensity of support for housing justice. Omari from HousingLOUISIANA shared in a small group discussion one of her fears concerning values-based messaging. “We want allies, but parts of the

narrative can push away potential allies. What we hear on the surface may sound good. Based on who is hearing it, it can work against our own self-interest,” said Omari. Based on their experience with on-the-ground organizing Fellows like Omari wanted to be sure groups focused on the right audience, including their base of supporters and people who could be persuaded.

Fellows described using value-based messages more intentionally in actions, on social media, on their websites, within emails, and in their recruitment scripts. Kea suggested new messaging could focus on how “children deserve to be in a safe place to live, and everyone deserves a place we can afford.” Gina, from Washington CAN, created a banner with her cohort where they used value-based messaging, as a result of the Fellowship learnings: “that was definitely something that came directly from learning about those value statements. In the designing of the banner, more than any of the, what does it look like or anything, it was actually [the value statements] that we kept coming back to...because it felt so important.”

Others affirmed values-based messages were already part of their organizing work. Heidi, from RUN, said “the most important thing is that shelter is a basic need. We say that every time we meet.” “We [also] use a lot of references to kids deserving a right to home, having a right to feel safe at home and access to education and housing,” added Erin from Washington CAN.

Interconnectedness of Housing

The Initiative research urged messengers to link housing with a broad set of economic, physical and emotional markers of well-being. Fellows immediately saw the connections between housing, family, health, education, access to work, and many other important aspects of one’s quality of life. “I see how housing affects daycare, school, productivity, and wellness,” said Katia from Human Solutions. Gaige, from HousingNOLA, mentioned housing as offering access to good paying jobs, although raised the concern that this did not impact all people the same as immigrant people continued to hold the lowest-paying jobs. Moreover, Fellows discussed how housing affordability issues, quality, and access were connected to larger issues of inequity around pay, discrimination, and corporate greed.

A conversation within one breakout group helps offer some insight into the types of conversations Fellows shared about the interconnectedness of housing. Within the breakout group, a Fellow suggested housing was connected to the economy, raising an issue with the self-interested dominant narrative that we should “trust the market.”

“White people, because of generational wealth, may be more removed from discussions of affordable housing,” pointed out Katia.

“They [wealth holders] don’t think low-income people are part of the economy in the first place” said Heidi from RUN.

“Our realities aren’t necessarily theirs, the everyday struggle of low-income people, especially in the day-to-day” replied Nicholas from UNE.

In this exchange, Fellows grappled with the social exclusion of marginalized people and how this exclusion perhaps allowed low-income people to see the interconnectedness of housing with health and economic security in ways people with relative racial and economic privilege could miss. Answering a question around where white study respondents stood on messages related to the economy, Chris (Staff) confirmed that white Americans had mixed perceptions that housing impacted the economy but reconfirmed that white Americans, similar to other groups who participated in the research, resonate with messages that include children, jobs, and wages. The breakout groups allowed Fellows to process, ask questions, and return to a larger group for clarifications and a summary.

The intersections between housing and immigration were mentioned several times throughout the fellowship. Maria from RUN shared with the larger group that “there are a lot of people in the Latino community that are not legally here, and immigration and stuff worries them and scares them...Being taken away from their family.” Weeks later, someone from the group shared how “immigrants are walking all the way from Honduras and Guatemala...They are coming here looking for a piece of the American Dream... A house is a home... its

protection... little children would not be walking to the United States if that's not true." In response, a Fellow raised the issue that we have a housing crisis in the world and "Now we got a double housing crisis. You can put those people in You can put those people in hotels, and you can't even get those people out of tents. We have a problem," they said. There was silence at first, followed by a reminder from Chris (Staff): "The way I see the solution to the problem is that we don't need to be competing between communities. The solution is we need to provide housing to everybody, and that's the thing we are all here fighting for." Chris' response uplifted the values of housing for everybody, working against the dominant narrative of scarcity that benefits elites instead of everyday people. Chris used this opportunity as a learning moment, using "I" statements that invited this Fellow to focus on the broader goal of housing for everyone.

Spreading The Word

Leaders appreciated being part of a national housing justice movement, joined by the Fellowship. Bomani said the Fellowship helped so “it doesn't seem like you're just here by yourself.” Groups across the country used the narrative strategies learned and expanded on through the Fellowship in actions and organizing activities within six geographical cohorts. Fellows described these activities as “spreading the word” or “spreading information” to share the HJN Initiative findings with the right people to increase the intensity of support around housing justice issues. This section offers examples of activities and actions from each cohort, which a Community Change Staff Lead supported. Each cohort was affected by retention as 11 Fellows who started the Fellowship were, for various reasons, unable to finish (one organizer also joined in Phase 2 of the Fellowship). Nonetheless, having a combination of leaders and organizers within close proximity (in addition to a Staff Lead) tended to facilitate more collaboration and progress on geographical cohort activities.

California

The California cohort had five Resident United Network (RUN) leaders and two Housing California organizers (RUN is a project of Housing California). The group's main event was the RUN Summit. The group also participated in Housing California's 2021 UNconference, where leaders shared key HJN Initiative learnings with people across the State of California. They shared ideas on using HJN messaging, including creating a book with a collection of stories of lived experience and holding an action where leaders put “messages in a bottle” for legislators about the need for true housing justice and homes for all. From this cohort, Idalia was featured in a “Women on the Frontlines” video series collaboration between Shelterforce and Community Change. She highlighted the need for people with lived experience to get involved to create systemic change. Idalia also wrote an Op-Ed in Denver Voice entitled: “La Regla De Oro”: Es Esencial Cuando Hablamos de Vivienda” (The Golden Rule: It is Essential when We Talk About Housing”).

Colorado

The Colorado cohort had one leader from 9to5 and five organizers from UNE, Together Colorado, and 9to5. The cohort had two main activities, including a rent control campaign and a ballot initiative. The rent control campaign aimed to build a base of supporters through educating, inspiring, and developing a winning narrative. Some of the dominant narratives they worked against included messages that Colorado was not ready for rent control because this would hurt small landlords, and Colorado may lose business. The transformative messaging the group used within the campaign included:

- Coloradans are ready for rent control and most favor this policy
- “It’s about people, not profit,”
- “The government has a role,” and
- “The market should not dictate how our lives are going to be”

The group used values-based messaging in advertising and held two events in the summer of 2021, where grassroots leaders provided testimonies, and spoken word artists joined to inspire the group. The events also provided Spanish interpretation.

Together Colorado joined a group of organizations who ran a ballot initiative fighting against Measure 2F (“No on 2F: Keep Denver Housed”), which would have overturned a City Council rule that allowed up to five unrelated adults (previously limited to two) to live together and made it easier to build halfway homes, shelters, residential care facilities, and recovery homes. The end to this rule would have harmful impacts and limit affordable housing. Fighting against the dominant narrative that housing prices would decrease with inclusive housing policies like these, the campaign used HJN messaging including: “All Denver residents, no matter what we look like, where we come from deserve a safe place to call home,” and “all are welcomed.” United with a coalition of groups opposing this City Council change, the co-living rule remained in place.

Detroit, Michigan

The Detroit cohort had five Affordable Housing Task Force members and one Detroit People’s Platform organizer. In addition to two virtual events, the Affordable Housing Task Force co-sponsored an in-person “Affordable Housing

Informational Fair” in October 2021, where 60-70 people attended. Guest speakers included Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib, State Senator Stephanie Chang, and Ari Ruttenberg, the Chief Analyst for Detroit City Council President Mary Sheffield. During the event, HJN Fellows asked attendees about their vision for housing in Detroit. The following responses sprouted from this dialog: “True affordable housing,” “housing that is \$500 and under,” “housing that is clean and safe,” and “being able to stay in the City of Detroit.” Among the messaging shared at the event was the values statement that “All Detroit children and families deserve a place called home which is affordable.”

The gathering provided education about the housing justice and affordable housing organizing in Detroit, calling attendees to action to sign a right to counsel petition and vote in the up-and-coming election. Several people shared an interest in joining the group's Affordable Housing Task Force. The informational session also connected people with emergency housing situations to organizations that could help them find housing.

For the Detroit People’s Platform, the primary policy goal during the Fellowship was the reform of the City Charter that would among other things address several issues of housing injustice. The group planned to use language from the HJN within a proposed City Charter Revision, emphasizing that the city government must provide safe and decent housing for its residents regardless of zip code. DPP’s strategy included training its members in the HJN tools and strategies in preparation for a door knocking outreach and education push in the summer of 2021. In addition to the organizer participating in the Fellowship, DPP had several members participate in a multi-day ‘train the trainers’ session on how to teach others to utilize the Housing Justice Narrative. Just as the door knocking was scheduled to begin, however, many Detroit families experienced flooding and the destruction of their personal property. DPP realized that to connect with the people, the folks knocking on the doors had to modify their script to talk about the impact of the flooding first. DPP decided while



Action in Detroit, Michigan.
Image Description: Advocates sit socially distanced outside on chairs, listening to a speaker.

The script could not focus as much on housing justice as planned, that using the four HJN strategies - center race, lead with lived experience, go bold with solutions, and use widely held values - would help them connect to people on the impact of the climate crisis and the city's inadequate infrastructure. Kea, an organizer with DPP noted that the four core strategies have a flexibility and durability to be applied to a range of racial and economic justice issues. In addition, the group planned to incorporate HJN messaging into a resolution to use local-level data to set income limits for affordable housing access, ensuring the lowest-income tenants have first access to housing. From this cohort, Donna was also featured in the "Women on the Frontlines" video series, where she used the values-based message: "everybody deserves a place to call home."

Louisiana

The Louisiana cohort consisted of organizing staff from HousingNOLA, Build Baton Rouge, and Habitat for Humanity Lafayette. The group planned to conduct a base-building "bootcamp" for residents focused on the intersections between housing, health, and other quality of life markers. Although their event has not yet come to fruition as planned, the group participated in several helpful brainstorms for future use. In this planning, the group contested dominant narratives that housing is an individual problem and the disconnect between housing and other community issues families in Louisiana face every day. At their future event, they plan to use the HJN messaging: "housing is a human need. Housing is foundational to health, recreation, and transportation." A main goal of the event will be to identify community problems and turn them into issues the group could organize around. The group continues to share the HJN Initiative findings with others and to push for better housing policies and a police system based on equity.

Oregon

The Oregon cohort included three Residents Organized for Change (ROC) leaders (ROC is a project of Neighborhood Partnerships) and one organizer

from Human Solutions. The group’s main goal was to build their base of directly impacted people who should have a say in how to solve our housing crisis. Their main project was creating two videos, one used for recruitment, one used for potential donors, and both will include resonating messages created with learnings from the Fellowship. The Oregon cohort has held several HJN training sessions for ROC members and other grassroots groups in the state and presented at a well-attended webinar through the National Low Income Housing Coalition.

The Oregon cohort continues to challenge dominant narratives that blame people for systemic housing issues, and instead they share transformative narratives in their organizing work including:

- “Housing is a universal need and the foundation from which we build our lives,”
- “Families are at the heart of our communities and need to be supported,” and
- “Veterans need to be honored with real support.”

Mandee from ROC has been featured in Housing for the People, the International Network of Street Papers, and The Source Weekly. She was quoted using the following housing justice narrative messaging: “We need solutions and policies that assure all of us have a place to call home,” and “Like air we breathe, housing is a basic human need.” The group has also brainstormed ideas to create a banner, lawn signs and posters, and swag to spread awareness of their housing justice goals.

Washington

The Washington cohort included two leaders, one organizer, and one communications director from Washington CAN, one leader and organizer from the Resident Action Project (RAP), and an organizing fellow from The Washington Housing Action Fund. The group designed a bright yellow “eviction



Image Description: Leaders hold a banner evicting legislators from their offices for not prioritizing families in Washington.

notice” banner and, as an action, took pictures with the banner in front of a Vancouver courthouse and the City Hall building. They also held a press conference in Seattle where two local press members from Real Change and The Stranger attended to document the stories shared by tenants who were facing housing eviction. The Stranger published a piece that quoted the group putting forth solutions and demands to extend an eviction moratorium, which was set to expire on June 30, 2021, but was instead extended until February 2022.

“How are We Emerging from this Stronger?”

Throughout the Fellowship (and particularly in Phase 3), participants shared lessons they learned about implementing the HJN Initiative research into action. Overall, Staff emphasized a sense of gratitude for the dedication of Fellows for their commitment and willingness to work and grow together during a time of uncertainty. “Our learning path will continue far beyond this fellowship,” said Michael (Staff), recognizing the many wins and challenges Fellows faced throughout the pandemic, both in their movement work and within their family lives. Michael stressed the importance of celebrating and learning from their progress, including the activity that did not produce what the group had hoped. Throughout this final phase, a resounding theme can be summarized with a question Cesar (Staff) posed to the group: “How are we emerging from this stronger?”

As they did throughout the Fellowship, the Staff created spaces of reflection and sharing. Some of the themes in these conversations included alleviating the stress and tension of movement work, stretching the spaces of joy created in community with each other, and setting boundaries to fully connect with family. One Fellow stated: “A lot of us are so busy...we want time to relax,” others wished for more time for reflection, small group work and an eventual in-person Fellowship Alumni gathering (See Table 2 for Fellow’s must-haves and wish list). Overwhelmingly Fellows shared feeling more confident, prepared, and hopeful as they continued their journey of spreading a housing justice narrative to address racial inequity in housing and advance an agenda for homes for all. Some even said they used some of the practical messaging tools (i.e., Messaging Box) to get points across within their families.

We hope the insights shared throughout this evaluation can be helpful to leaders and organizers who have ongoing or potential Housing Justice Narrative implementation efforts. The evaluation process highlights that intentionally grounded Fellowships like this one are not one-directional learning endeavors but rather co-learning spaces with Fellows at the center. Fellows’ engagement and analysis of what research findings mean and how these play out within their local contexts stand as a reminder that the contributions of grassroots leaders make any research, evaluation,

implementation (and the list could go on) process better. We must continue to invest in the leadership of directly impacted people, for their personal and collective transformations are inextricably linked to our visions for housing for all and other policy goals that prioritize Black, brown, and immigrant families.

Table 2. Must Haves and Wish List

Fellowship Must-Haves

- Opportunities for sharing, feedback, and celebrating
- Reflection time and longer breakouts for discussion time
- In-depth collaboration with other teams/groups between regions. This would broaden experiences of doing projects with other teams/regions to learn more in-depth on how to organize people
- Ongoing organizer in each region + Community Change lead
- Stipends for participating, technology and childcare
- Fun stuff including care packages, music playlists, and icebreaker conversations
- Seeing previous groups' actions, what they used (materials, resources, etc.), designing the event/action and how they used the tools and why
- Develop participants' writing, speaking, and evaluation skills

Fellowship Wish List

- Share Fellowship in different languages + sign language
- HJNF Spiral Bound Workbook of all the documents, tools, information, etc. for quick, easy reference.
- HJN Fellows in the White House and State Capitols to advise the President and state leaders
- "POWER DAY" In-person Convention with Fellows and stakeholders working on solutions and include trainings and speakers, with interpretation
- See more work on homeless vets
- More examples or different ways to organize with various populations or areas (i.e., rural and city)
- Have continuous Fellow cohort meetings throughout the fellowship in all phases. Fellowship started with meeting twice a week to meeting every three weeks, and less during action planning, which is perhaps too much time in between meetings

- Combine regions closer together to collaborate more. Consider the number of participants of each team/region and the areas they live and advocate in and find a way to create opportunities to do actions and events in-person (at least by region)
- Create an opportunity for attendees/Fellows to show appreciation to the sponsoring organization
- Have an in-person Fellowship gathering in the future

Appendix A Fellowship Participants

California

Heidi Boune

RUN (Resident United Network)

Iris Murillo

Housing California

Maria Hernandez

RUN (Resident United Network)

Jazmin Posas

Housing California

Daphne Lamb-Perrilliat

RUN (Resident United Network)

Idalia N. Rios

RUN (Resident United Network)

Lavearn London

RUN (Resident United Network)

Colorado

Meghan Carrier

Together Colorado

Brenda Gutierrez

9to5

Victor Galvin

UNE (United for a New Economy)

Nicholas Marquez

UNE (United for a New Economy)

Luz Galicia

9to5

Jessica Ramos

9to5

Louisiana

Gaige Hargrave

HousingNOLA

Tina Shelvin-Bingham

Habitat for Humanity Lafayette

Omari Ho-Sang

HousingLOUISIANA

Tavares Swafford

HousingLOUISIANA

Geno McLaughlin

Build Baton Rouge

Cynthia Thomas

HousingNOLA

Detroit, Michigan

Tahira Ahmad

Detroit Affordable Housing Task Force

Kea Mathis

Detroit People's Platform

Anemashaun Bomani

Detroit Affordable Housing Task Force

Yvonne McKay

Detroit Affordable Housing Task Force

Nzingha Masani-Manuel

Detroit Affordable Housing Task Force

Donna Price

Detroit Affordable Housing Task Force

Oregon

Erin Meechan

ROC (Residents Organized for Change)

Katia Selezneva

Human Solutions

Mandee Seeley

ROC (Residents Organized for Change)

Michelle Thurston

ROC (Residents Organized for Change)

Washington

Joelle Craft

Washington CAN

Gina Owens

Washington CAN

Brook Fadley

RAP (Resident Action Project)

Duaa-Rahemaah Williams

Washington Low Income Housing Alliance

Erin Fenner

Washington CAN

Mary Zhou

Washington Housing Action Fund

Isaac Organista

Washington CAN

*** In total, 36 Fellows participated and 24 Fellows completed the Fellowship.*

Appendix B Methodology Notes

At the start of the Fellowship I (Jennifer), introduced myself as a participant evaluator of the Fellowship. With their permission, I would help to document the Fellowship through participant observations by taking detailed notes and would invite Fellows to engage in key parts of the evaluation if there was interest. I explained the goal of the evaluation process was to share learnings with one another and the larger housing justice community. My hope was to help develop a participatory research evaluation process that would improve our findings and increase the capacity of leaders and organizers to conduct qualitative research. I asked Fellows to let me know via email or private Zoom chat if they did not wish to participate in the evaluation component of the fellowship or if they wished to remain anonymous, of which no Fellows contacted me for these reasons.

During Phase II of the fellowship, after several weeks of interacting with Fellows, I organized a short session with Fellows to brainstorm potential questions to include in an evaluation interview guide (see next page for the final guide). After this session, I sent a short survey to the group, inquiring about their interest in being involved in conducting one-on-one interviews, analyzing one-on-one interviews, writing up the learning report, and or participating in the share out of the final learning report. Ten Fellows expressed interest, and nine of them became involved in at least one area of the evaluation process.

Once we established the interview team, each leader attended a research training workshop I led, which overviewed key parts of the consent, interview, and reflection process and included time to practice interviewing tips I shared. We then invited Fellows to sign up to participate in a one-on-one interview, of which 16 Fellows participated. I assisted in coordinating interviews, creating Zoom meeting links that would automatically begin recording as soon as the meeting began (but did not require the host to attend). Once the interviews were completed, they were transcribed verbatim for analysis. Interview facilitators received \$150 per interview, and interview volunteers were entered into a raffle to win a \$100 gift card.

After another round of analysis trainings I led, the Evaluation-Learning team spent several weeks analyzing the one-on-one interviews and reflections and pulled out themes or “codes” from those interviews. I referenced the hundreds of pages of field notes from my participant observations to cross-check these themes and key findings developed from both sources. From these codes, and assisted by an interview analysis software, NVIVO, we expanded on these themes in this findings report. In place of summarization, whenever possible, the report offers direct quotes from participants to offer a living document of the people and ideas shared throughout.

One-on-one Interview Guide Facilitated by Fellows

Warm-up and Introduction

Thank you so much for participating in this interview. I’m really excited to learn from you and hear about your fellowship journey. To get started why don’t you....

- Tell me about YOUR journey to doing this important work around housing justice issues? Walk me through how you got started until now.
- Tell me about your experience as a Housing Justice Narrative Fellow. Walk me through it, take your time.
 - Tell me about the most memorable moment you had during the fellowship?
 - Tell me about how you grew as a leader? [Tell me more about that.]
- What part of the training spoke to you the most? [Follow-up: Which part made you most excited, which talked to your soul?]

Learnings into Action

What a great introduction to your experiences in the fellowship, including what you’ve learned and how that has shaped you. Now, I’d like to talk about how you’ve put these learnings into action. I’m curious....

- How did you use what you learned in the fellowship in your organizing work (i.e., organizing, base-building, actions)?
- Tell me about the fellowship tools that have been the most useful? [i.e., message box, story of self]
 - Tell me an example of how you used something you learned.

What's been the hardest part of this fellowship? [follow-up: Tell me an example of a time things were difficult for you in your participation; confusing terms?]

- Tell me what dominant narrative means to you? What about what a transformative narrative means to you?
- There are dominant narratives or lies told about people who face housing insecurity all the time. Tell me about one dominant narrative that you think is most harmful?
 - Tell me about how you have worked to change that narrative?

Implementation and Sharing Learnings

Wow, I'm learning so much here. Thank you again for sharing and for giving me all the details you can think of to help us document our learnings. The next questions I have are around implementation and sharing of learnings. Tell me...

- What were some of the difficulties with implementing the HJN into actions?
 - Follow-up] Especially during COVID, how did you and your team work through this?
- What types of activities have you done to get other people excited about this narrative work?
- How are folks responding to the messaging/framework?
 - [Follow-up] How are other people, like partner organizations or public officials, picking up on the narrative/messaging and repeating it out
- Tell me about how comfortable you are in applying what you have learned through the fellowship in your everyday work going forward?
- Tell me how you have used the 4 narrative strategies within your organizing work, these include,
 - Center race [and gender]
 - Lead with lived experience
 - Be bold with solutions
 - Use widely held deeply felt values
 - Walk me through a challenge you've had with implementing these strategies?

Exit

Now that we've talked about learnings and how you've used those learnings, before we end our call, I want to ask you to vision for a bit....

- If you could design the next Fellowship, what would you add or change. I'm asking you to dream big! [follow-up: anything you would change in Phase I (research), Phase II (implementation), and Phase III (learning)]?
- Thank you so much for talking with me today. I've learned so much. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix C Overview of Schedule

PHASE 1		
Date (2021)	Time (EST)	Purpose/Outcome
January 21	2:30-5 pm	Welcome and orient Fellows proposing a process of learning, reflection, and evaluation; exploring the role of narrative in building power; discussing dominant housing narratives/ what we are working against; and to increase familiarity with Housing Justice Narrative (HJN) research
January 22	2:30-5 pm	Cohorts of fellows share and learn what housing campaigns they are working on; Fellows gain deeper familiarity with Housing Justice Narrative research; and cohorts begin to assess how they might use HJN in their campaigns
January 28	2:30-5 pm	Fellows learn connection from Race-Class Narrative research and practice to HJN, revisit dial test slides for deeper learning about base, discuss together implications for centering race, and cohorts continue to assess how they might use HJN in their campaigns
January 29	2:30-5 pm	Conduct shared analysis of dial test responses to American Dream and History of Racism, and of the survey 'oversamples' to better understand the base; learn about how and what actions shift narrative; and cohorts continue to assess how they might use HJN in their campaigns by brainstorming potential actions.
February 4	2:30-5 pm	Fellows gain understanding of why values-based messages are so impactful for moving people, cohorts have the opportunity to apply values-based messages to campaign materials. Team flags opportunity to write an Op-Ed around federal housing policy

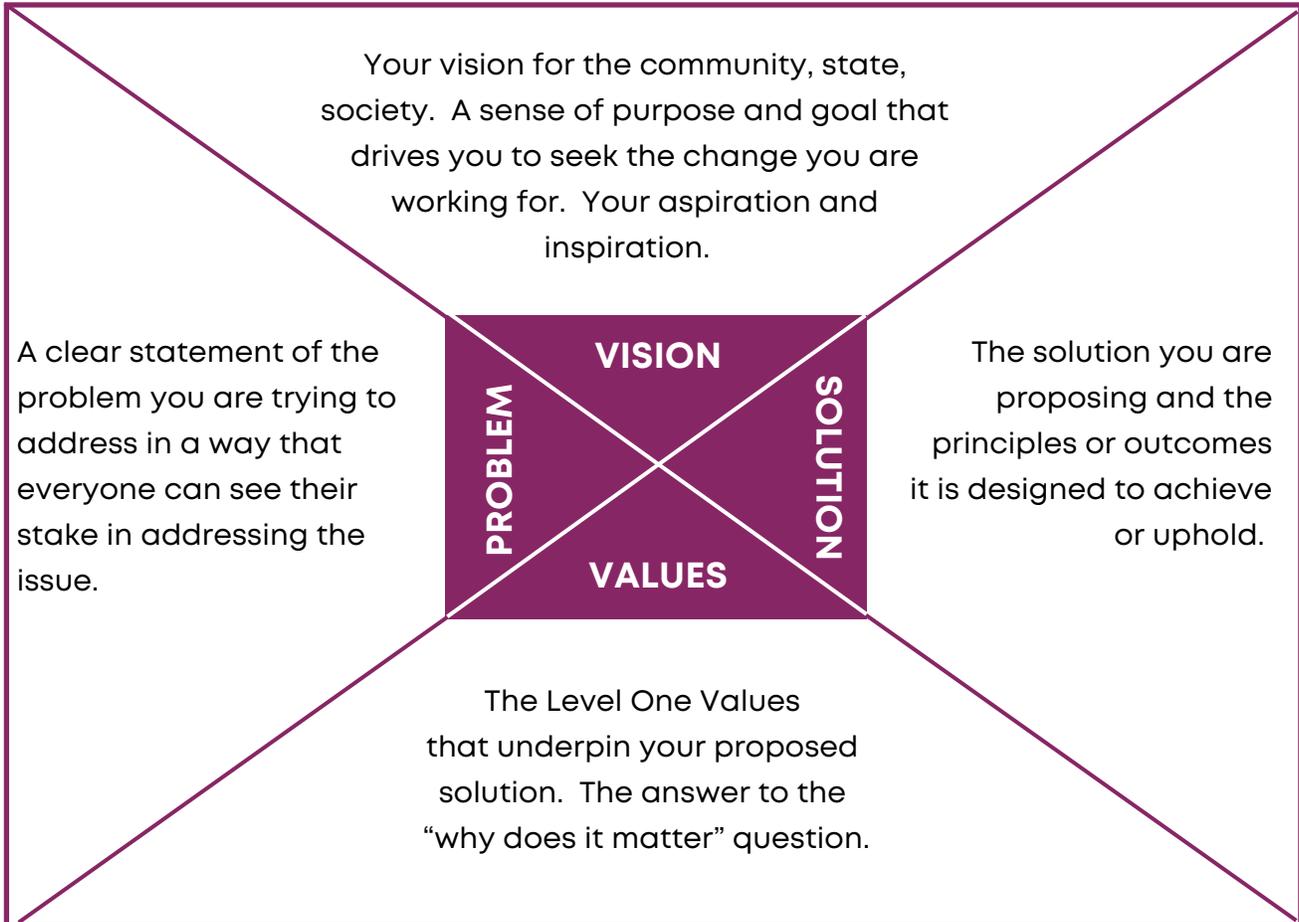
February 5	2:30-5 pm	Review of <u>transformational and dominant narratives</u> based on Fellow responses to a short survey, geographic cohorts continue to identify base building activities and action related to current campaign work.
February 11	2:30-5 pm	Introduce the Message Box tool and have Fellows practice using it in communication materials including their websites and flyers. Cohorts identify specific potential actions, details that need to be figured out, and other people to engage for actions to occur in Phase 2
February 12	2:30-5 pm	Cohorts develop actions and activities for Phase 2, share their plans with one another for feedback and revise their plans as needed. Fellows learn about the application process for up to \$20,000 in Action Funds, and celebrate together the completion of Phase 1.
PHASE 2		
Date (2021)	Time (EST)	Purpose/Outcome
March 4	3:30-5 pm	Cohorts receive feedback and new ideas on their actions and base building activities from other cohorts to incorporate into action plans
March 25	3:30-5 pm	Begin to develop shared analysis of what is and is not working and why- California and Oregon fellows share. Fellows introduced to HJN training curriculum
April 1 (Part 1- optional)	3:30-6 pm	Deep dive into HJN curriculum and training tools, to prepare fellows to lead trainings for others in their coalitions and campaigns
April 8 (Part 2- optional)	3:30-6 pm	Deep dive into HJN curriculum and training tools, to prepare fellows to lead trainings for others in their coalitions and campaigns

April 15	3:30-5pm	Begin to develop shared analysis of what is and is not working and why- Washington and Detroit fellows share; Introduce Story of Self curriculum
April 22 (Optional, Part 1)	3:30-5:30 pm	Understanding the structure of your Story of Self, writing down your story and practicing sharing it using HJNF learnings
April 29 (Optional, Part 2)	3:30-4:30	Understanding the structure of your Story of Self, writing down your story and practicing sharing it using HJNF learnings
May 6	3:30-5pm	Fellows learn about narrative shifts in Cincinnati, OH and have new ideas and perspectives on how to apply HJN narrative strategies to drive narrative change. Fellows learn about one-on-one interviews as a tool for learning and reflection
June 3 (Optional)	2-3:30pm	Fellows increase knowledge on designing an interview learning evaluation that can be applied to their work and have hands-on time to practice interviewing skills.
June 10 (Optional, with Comms team)	3-5pm	Building capacity for media relations work including pitching stories, building databases.
June 16 (Optional) with Childcare Changemakers	7pm-8pm	Building confidence in crafting and delivering stories in public places including online events/forums, grassroots actions meeting with elected officials and other venues.

PHASE 3

Date (2021)	Time (EST)	Purpose/Outcome
August 12	3-5pm	Creating a plan to share experiences and observations about HJNF implementation into campaigns and base building work; Evaluation-learning team of Fellows share initial themes from one-on-one interviews with other Fellows
Sept 9	3-5pm	Washington, Oregon and California share what they learned from actions, recruitment activities, working with media and talking with decision makers using HJNF learnings
Sept 16	3-5pm	Colorado, Louisiana, and Detroit share what they learned from actions, recruitment activities, working with media and talking with decision makers using HJNF learnings
Sept 23	3-5pm	Fellows reflect on themes and collective learnings from applying the HJNF tools to campaign, base building, and leadership development activities
Oct 7	3-4:30	Fellows shared key lessons and take-aways of applying the research and narrative tools to their organizing and housing advocacy work during the nine-month Fellowship (webinar for allies and key partners).
Oct 14	3-4:30	Fellows shared key lessons and take-aways of applying the research and narrative tools to their organizing and housing advocacy work during the nine-month Fellowship (Webinar for leaders, organizers, communicators, creators, artists, and advocates working to advance housing justice in communities across the United States).
Oct 21	3-4:45	Celebrating the completion of the Housing Justice Narrative Fellowship, recognizing accomplishments and growth, and enjoying the connection and community we built together with games, reflection, and music.

Appendix D Message Box





COMMUNITY CHANGE