

Creating the Shared Narrative

AN UNCOMMON STORY FOR A COMMON CAUSE

From July 2018 - April 2019, Seven November, Inc. partnered with the Blue Sky Funders Forum to advance and complete the work of developing a compelling *shared narrative* for the collective's communications.

Envisioned as *the engine behind a new social movement* to bring more people to more frequent and positive experiences in the outdoors, and to encourage care and protection of the environment, the shared narrative has ambitious aspirations and far-reaching objectives.

- + ENGAGEMENT
- + PARTNERSHIPS
- + EQUITY

At its best, a master narrative is inspiring and compelling, offering space for each stakeholder to see their purpose and place in the vision.

It is *the story behind the story* that provides unity and framing to all the other information put forward. It helps communicators and audiences connect the dots between what is happening today and the vision of a better future.

It ensures everyone who tells the story uses a common and effective vocabulary, and anyone who hears it comes away with a shared understanding of importance of participating in the new future.

The narrative development has spanned multiple phases of work and hundreds of touch points to engage and learn from internal and external audiences.



PHASES OF WORK

Shared narrative development

01

Pre-Work

2017 -2019

2017 - June 2018

- + Task force formation and engagement.
- + Stakeholder engagement: interviews + online survey

02

Assessments

July - August 2018

- + Internal stakeholder interviews.
- + Small set external interviews.

03

Stakeholder Engagement

Sept - Dec 2018

- + West Creek workshop.
- + Brain trust formed.
- + Partner listening sessions.

04

Test and Deliver

Jan - April 2019

- + Draft narratives, values, messages for testing.
- + External (audience) interviews.
- + Present final values, narrative, messaging and recommendations for implementation.

SCOPE OF WORK

We listened to and learned from hundreds of stakeholders across the country.



AUDIENCES

From its inception, the shared narrative has been designed to reach and influence new audiences for a compelling environmental story.

Specifically, potential allies from “outside the tent” who can bring new resources and awareness to advancing the issue were identified by the Blue Sky Funders Forum as priority audiences.

After extensive refinement with the field, the following audiences were clarified and agreed to:

Policy makers and their staffs (federal, state and local)

Education funders

Health and healthcare funders

Children / youth/ next-generation funders

Corporate CSR and corporate wellness program leadership; corporate foundations

Community foundations

*Environmental funders **

** While not the primary audience for the shared narrative, those within the environmental space must understand and support the story.*

THE CURRENT NARRATIVE

By first understanding the drivers of the current narrative, and how that frames public perceptions and actions, we then set out to craft a compelling alternative narrative that frames our beliefs of the way things are and our preferences for how they should be.

The Current Narrative

It is nice for people to have time and experiences outdoors, and it may accrue some benefits to the individuals who spend time in nature, but lack of time in nature is not a national priority or issue. There are plenty of open spaces and safe parks in the country for people to go to if they choose.

The current, dominant narrative is not an intentional one and it is not being actively advanced by the Blue Sky Funders Forum or its community. It is, however, the prevailing narrative in the space and one we seek to shift.

Challenges with the current narrative

Lacks urgency	Sounds elitist
Expresses benefits (barely) to individuals, not communities.	Doesn't recognize access / equity issues.
Doesn't offer solutions, or even an understandable problem to be solved.	

How We Change the Narrative

FROM NICETY TO NECESSITY

Research shows that people will continue to align with a current narrative until presented with a resonant alternative. So we craft a new narrative that offers ideas and language our target audiences can see themselves in and adopt as their own, because it *aligns with shared values*.

To move our target audiences from nature as a “nice to have” to that of necessity, it is not enough to simply assert a dominant viewpoint. Cognitive science shows it is difficult to dislodge an entrenched narrative by stating facts that disprove it, because people instinctively reject ideas and information that do not confirm our worldviews. Instead, we need to *identify the pivot point* that will take stakeholders from the current narrative to one of priority, urgency and solvability.

Here is what we have discovered: *when we express the benefits of time spent outdoors as a basic human right - one that everyone deserves the opportunity to experience - that opens the door for new awareness and action* across the spectrum of the Blue Sky continuum.

The key insight is we must frame the benefits (specifically, community benefits) as a basic human right, not the time outdoors itself, which is a means to an end.

“There are so many public goods that we need and it’s hard to have nature be one of them, but living in a healthy community is a right.”

What We Learned

EXTERNAL TESTING METHODOLOGY

The West Creek Ranch workshop and the series of stakeholder listening sessions rendered significant progress on refining the narrative's goal, values and language.

From there we recommended the new narrative be approached through an *opportunity frame*, one which would express the benefits of time spent outdoors as an opportunity everyone deserves.

We applied thoughtful analysis to the data to find common ground language and craft messages that do not trigger partisan responses, but rather *connect the* Blue Sky's shared *goal to the hopes and values of those you seek to influence.*

Three draft narrative directions and 13 value statements were tested, along with vocabulary that had emerged in the internal discussions as potentially problematic, including *"nature," "outdoors" and "outside."*

During February and March of 2019, CAVU Research conducted 41 one-on-one interviews with stakeholders representing the target audiences to assess the agreement and resonance of the new messaging.

These in-depth interviews were at least 30-minutes each, allowing time for discussion and capturing of nuanced data. Participants were incentivized.

During the interviews, participants viewed a series of online screens displaying the narratives and messages, which they could rate and sort according to their preferences.

REPRESENTATIVE PARTICIPANTS



41 in-depth interviews

15% *policy makers + staff*

10% *corporate / CSR*

17% *education funders*

15% *health / healthcare funders*

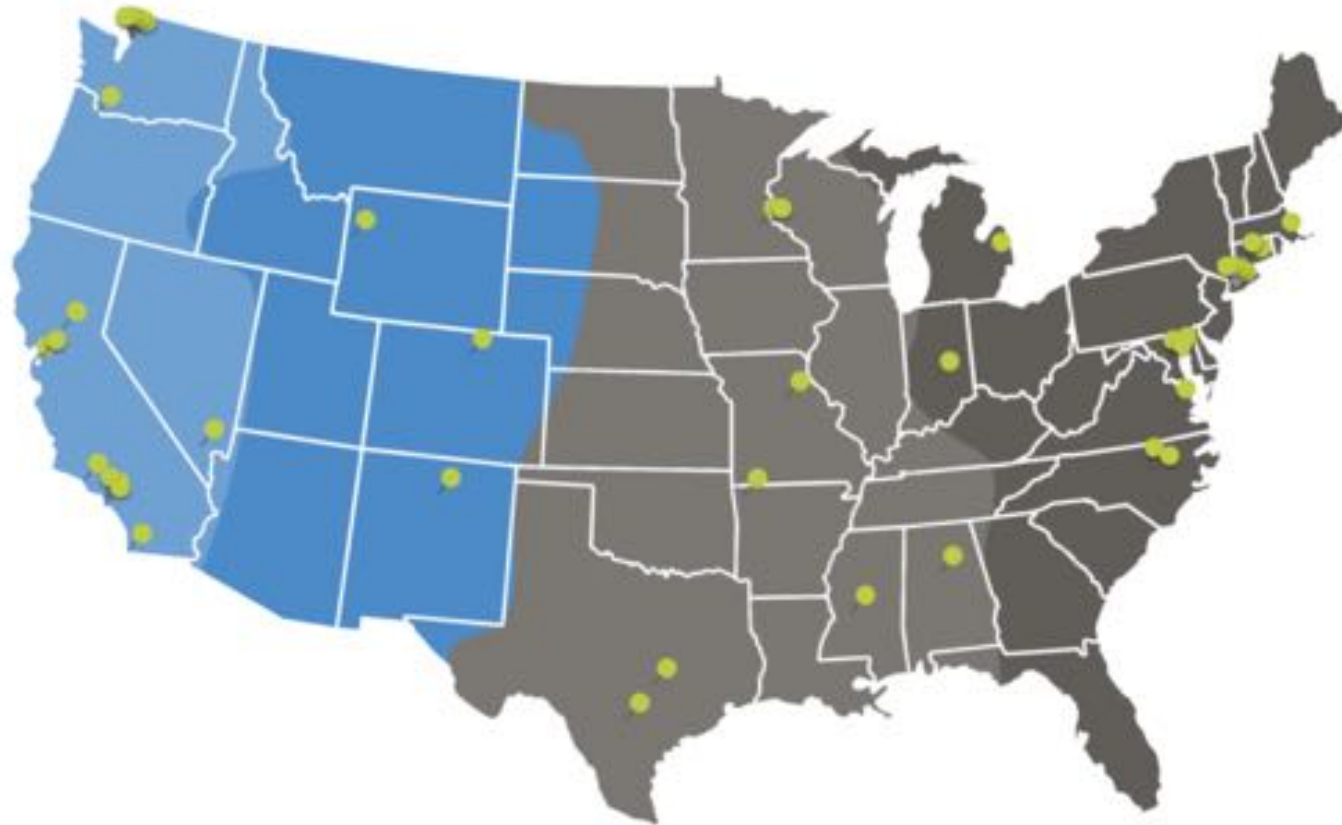
12% *children / youth funders*

12% *environmental funders*

20% *community foundations*

**many organizations crossed over into multiple categories*

SCOPE OF TESTING



Our study reached stakeholders across the country with representative samples from each time zone, and a cross-section of Blue Sky's priority audiences.

TOP LINE FINDINGS

Framing the benefits of time spent in nature as an opportunity everyone deserves is *a resonant frame that opens the conversation up* to include all areas of the Blue Sky collective. And that opportunity frame can lead audiences to the conclusion - which they fully support - that *living in a healthy community is an essential human right*.

The terms “*nature*,” “*outdoors*” and “*outside*” are not interchangeable. Each resonates differently with different audiences, and some trigger preconceived notions of elitism, urbanism and safety. These terms should be understood and used with intention. Not surprisingly, environmental funders and advocates were more likely to prefer the term ‘nature’ to ‘outdoors’ or ‘outside.’

The concept of *safety* outdoors deserves very specific messaging. For some, simply raising the issue of safety leads them to think of the outdoors as inherently unsafe, or triggers racial biases. For others, the lack of safe spaces in nature is an issue deserving of more awareness and support.

Blue Sky Funders Forum will continually bump up against the perception of time spent in nature as an elitist privilege, and the lack of representation of people of color and women in the outdoors and conservation spaces. To begin to counter this, it is critical to *avoid elitist language*, speak with an ‘ordinary people’ voice and share stories and data from people of all races, genders, ages and income levels benefiting from time spent outdoors.

Measurable differences did not emerge among the target audience segments in terms of their value priorities or likelihood to support the narrative goal. This is good news, as it means *we are successfully aligning ourselves with shared values*.

“Inclusive language that people see themselves in is really important. When we frame it as an equity question that highlights differences, that’s more powerful.”

Please stay away from language or images that might convey the idea of wealthy people sending their kids to Outward Bound.”

ORGANIZATIONAL VALUE ALIGNMENT

Using the top six values identified and held by the Blue Sky, we checked first for values alignment among the desired target audiences. This allows us to tailor our messaging to the most shared and resonant values.

Two values rose prominently to the top as being of most importance to the external stakeholders, while the remaining four were clustered toward the lower end of the spectrum.

This speaks to *a framing strategy that expresses our shared narrative in terms of how it contributes to stronger, more inclusive communities.* In this way, we align our work most closely with the priorities of those we seek to influence.

Given our focus on audiences primarily outside of the environmental sector, it makes sense that a *healthy and sustainable environment* as a value received the lowest percentage of 10 rankings (29%). However, we can see environmental values still being important to these stakeholders, as seven out of ten respondents rated it an 8 or above for importance.

<i>Organizational Value</i>	<i>Rated 10 or 9 for importance (1-10 scale)</i>
Strengthening communities	71%
An equitable, inclusive and diverse society	68%
Personal and public health and wellbeing	51%
Promoting education and an educated populace	46%
Investing in the development of children and the next generation	46%
A healthy and sustainable environment	44%

TOP VALUE STATEMENTS

We tested 13 specific value statements representing the spectrum of the top six values identified by Blue Sky (community, d/i/e, health, environment, children and education).

Participants were asked to rate each statement on a scale of 1-10 (10 being highest) for being compelling (meaning evocative, interesting) and credible (meaning believable, true).

Of the 13 tested, *five* rose to the top for being both highly compelling and highly credible.

Notably, two of the top five are diversity, equity and inclusion messages and two are health-focused.

All people should have access to nature, regardless of where they live and their social or economic status.

We need to make sure all Americans, regardless of where they live, have the opportunity to live in healthy communities.

Everyone should have the opportunity to have safe, welcoming experiences outside.

Time spent in nature positively contributes to human well-being, providing a respite from the stress of modern life.

America's young people deserve opportunities to thrive outdoors, so they can become informed and engaged stewards of our natural resources.

ALL PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO NATURE, REGARDLESS OF WHERE THEY LIVE AND THEIR SOCIAL OR ECONOMIC STATUS.

Top rated of all 13 value statements.

“This is perfect, the kind of message that can start a conversation.”

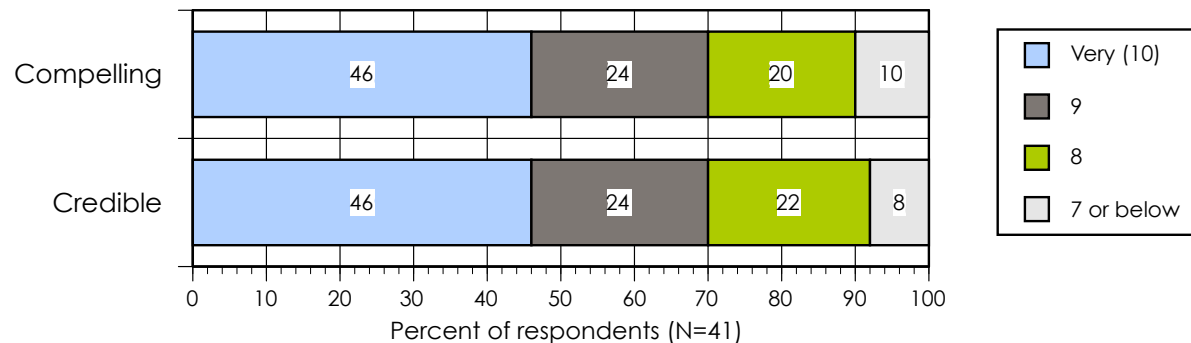
Stakeholders respond positively to notions of *justice, opportunity and community.*

“The access language is very compelling; part of the enjoyment of nature is the act of getting to nature.”

For some, this resonates most as *an urban message.* ‘Access’ is seen as a particular challenge for urban populations.

“This gets to racial equity and inclusion.”

“This is a human rights statement. Anything we as a community can do to establish a natural environment as a right is a good thing.”



WE NEED TO MAKE SURE ALL AMERICANS, REGARDLESS OF WHERE THEY LIVE, HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO LIVE IN HEALTHY COMMUNITIES.

In the top two for both compelling and credible to new audiences.

Scored highly for inclusiveness, highlighting disparities, *opportunity language*.

“Healthy communities” tests well, but warrants further definition.

“Americans” is a problematic descriptor, as it triggers questions of citizenship, immigration and rights. “All people” or “everyone” was seen as more inclusive.

“Very compelling and credible; value-positive and neutral. Uses both opportunity language and ‘healthy.’”

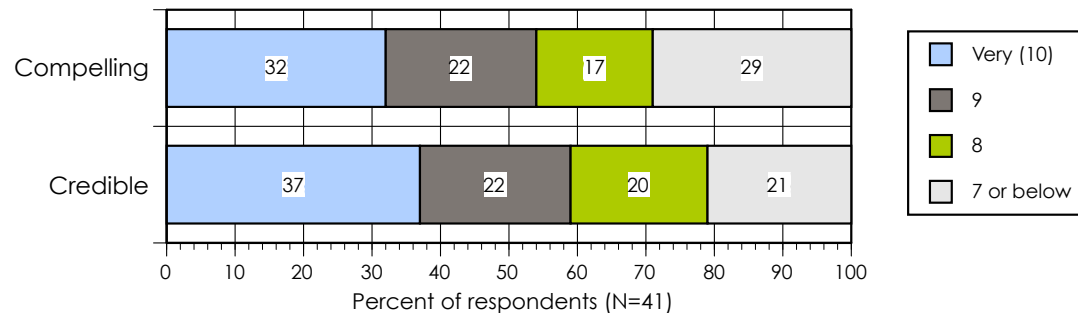
“Love it!”

*“This is the kind of **message that resonates** with my organization. It touches on communities of color not getting benefits.”*

*“Inclusive, simple, hard to argue with that. We always need to tie in ‘healthy’ communities and people; mental, physical and emotional. My top choice among all; **it will hook people.**”*

*“I like ‘regardless of where they live’ because it highlights that **opportunity doesn’t exist everywhere.**”*

“Healthy communities crosses over in ways that nature and similar terms do not.”



EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE SAFE, WELCOMING EXPERIENCES OUTSIDE.

Seen as an inclusive, non argumentative, crisp statement.

In this phrasing, ‘outside’ is not seen as broad enough for what we seek to communicate. Suggestions included changing ‘outside’ to ‘nature,’ or amplifying it as ‘outside in their communities.’

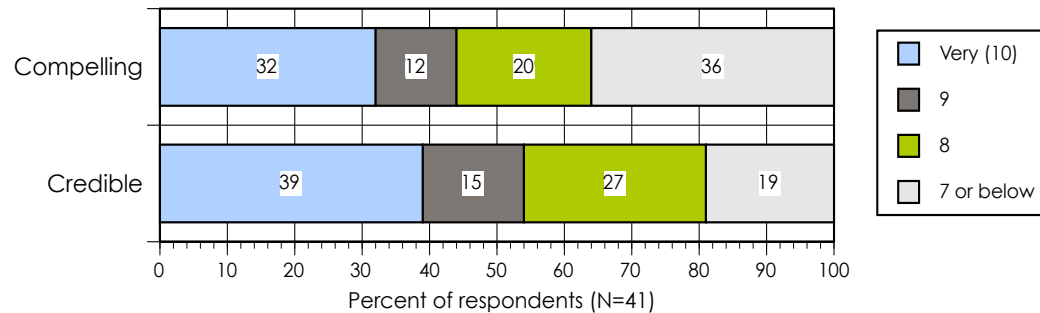
The terms ‘safe’ and ‘welcoming’ continue to need clarity and definition. Stakeholders were quick to point out that being in nature is not always welcoming.

“I like the equity component and the balance of safe and enriching. It has depth to it.”

“The inclusion of the word ‘welcoming’ is positive, but needs to be defined and not just in a white euro-centric perspective. I consider the word ‘safe’ differently because I’m a woman of color; it doesn’t just mean free of guns, but am I going to be treated respectfully?”

“When you say ‘everyone’ that speaks to inclusion; we all want our kids to be safe, feel welcome and have meaningful experiences.”

“How could you argue with that?”



*TIME SPENT IN NATURE POSITIVELY CONTRIBUTES TO HUMAN WELL-BEING,
PROVIDING A RESPITE FROM THE STRESS OF MODERN LIFE.*

Seen as a straightforward, relatable statement.

“When I try to boil down why my interest in the environment is so strong, this is what it boils down to.”

Seen as more credible (59% 10/9) than compelling (41% 10/9).

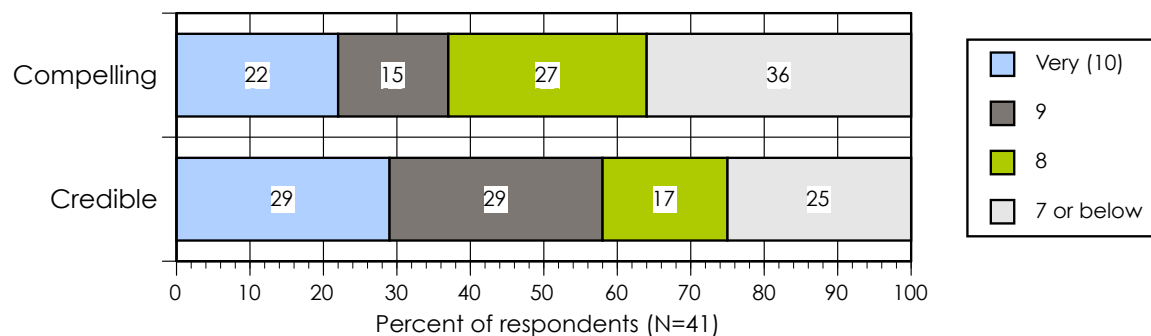
“When you come from a place where you appreciate spending time outside, you look to the outdoors as a respite. For city kids, it can be a really stressful experience. With mentoring, it can become a respite, but not necessarily from the start.”

More resonant for urban audiences.

“This is a message that needs to be heard right now in relation to how much stress there is in modern life and how desperate people are for relief. If I had a personal motto, this would be it!”

“Particularly compelling because we live in a society that produces a ton of stress and people look at nature as reducing stress.”

“I’m not sure farm workers here in the Central Valley share this perspective.”



AMERICA'S YOUNG PEOPLE DESERVE OPPORTUNITIES TO THRIVE OUTDOORS, SO THEY CAN BECOME INFORMED AND ENGAGED STEWARDS OF OUR NATURAL RESOURCES.

A top choice among policy makers who see it as compelling, true and necessary.

“Getting young people out now - this language is very good. And it doesn't use the word environment which can be politically divisive.”

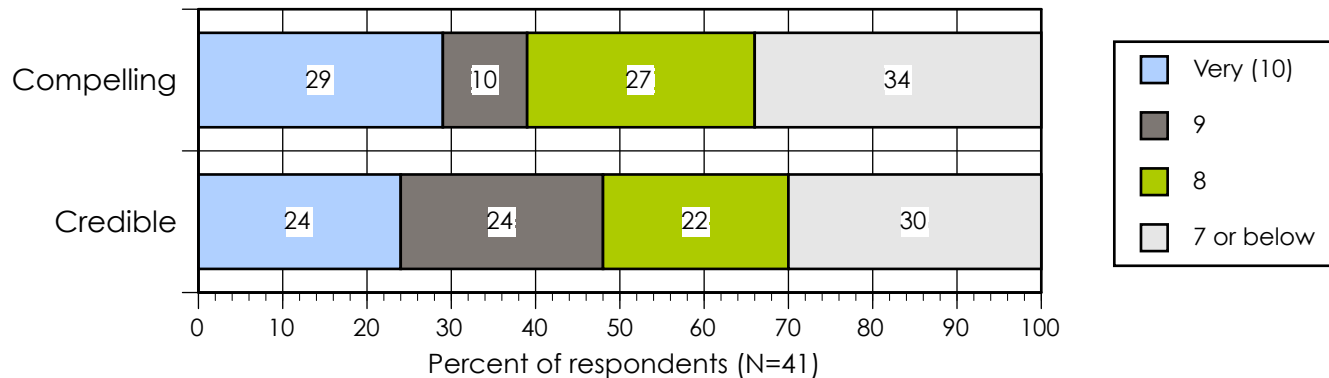
The descriptor 'America' raises concerns with citizenship, exclusivity and immigration.

“Talking about opportunities is always a positive message; a bipartisan message.”

“The word deserve makes it a human right.”

“Deserve is a victim frame; I don't like it.”

“Even though I know what steward means it's a bit environ-jargony.”



VALUE STATEMENTS RANKED BY COMPELLING

All people should have access to nature, regardless of where they live or their social or economic status.

We need to make sure all Americans, regardless of where they live, have the opportunity to live in healthy communities.

Everyone should have the opportunity to have safe, welcoming, meaningful experiences outside.

America's young people deserve opportunities to thrive outdoors, so they can become informed and engaged stewards of our natural resources.

Time spent in nature positively contributes to human well-being, providing a respite from the stress of modern life.

Nature is indispensable to human wellbeing – a necessary element of life – therefore deserving of public support that can make nature's benefits accessible to everyone, everywhere.

Nature is in our roots; the source of human life. When people connect with nature they are better able to connect with themselves and their communities.

Proven strategies that improve physical and mental health benefit all of us. We're all better off when we're all better off.

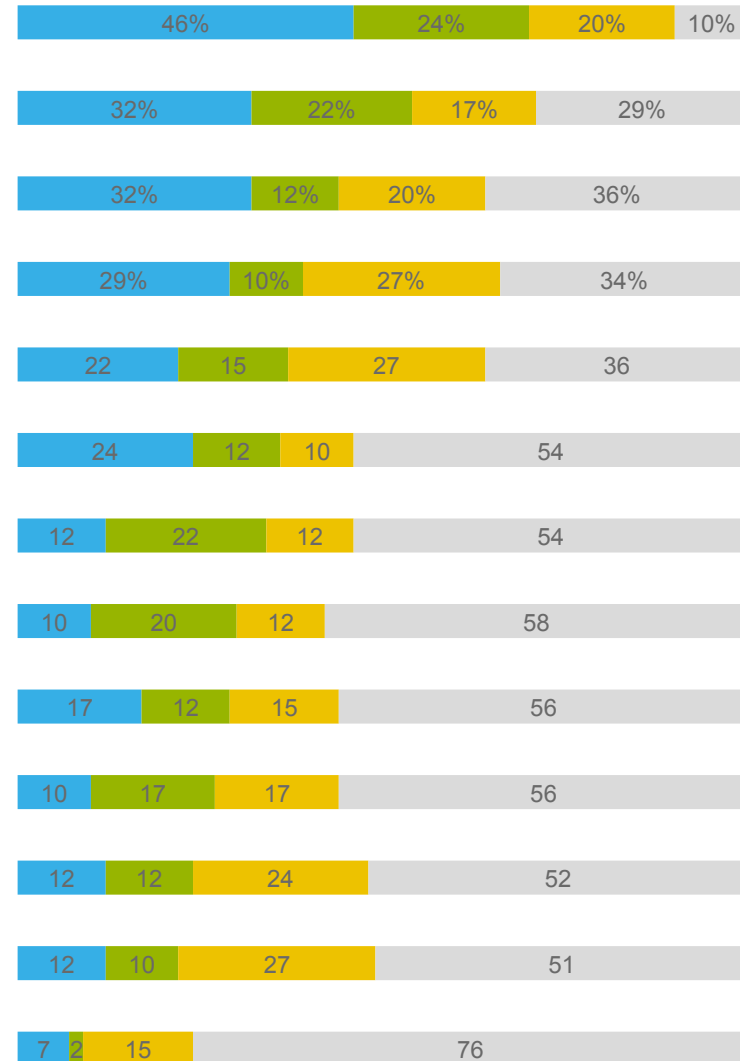
Because nature makes a meaningful difference in the health and vibrancy of communities; it deserves support as a source of public good.

When people see themselves as part of and connected to nature, our communities will be healthier and more resilient.

Because learning happens through experiences and hands-on interactions, we need to ensure our young people have opportunities to learn in and appreciate the outdoors.

To create the future we want, we need our children to have better health, education and community engagement. A simple start is to encourage them all to learn and thrive outdoors.

Expanding access to nature creates a halo effect of health and social benefits, and is increasingly necessary in our rapidly urbanizing society.



■ 10 ■ 9 ■ 8 ■ 7 or lower

VALUE STATEMENTS RANKED BY CREDIBLE

All people should have access to nature, regardless of where they live or their social or economic status.

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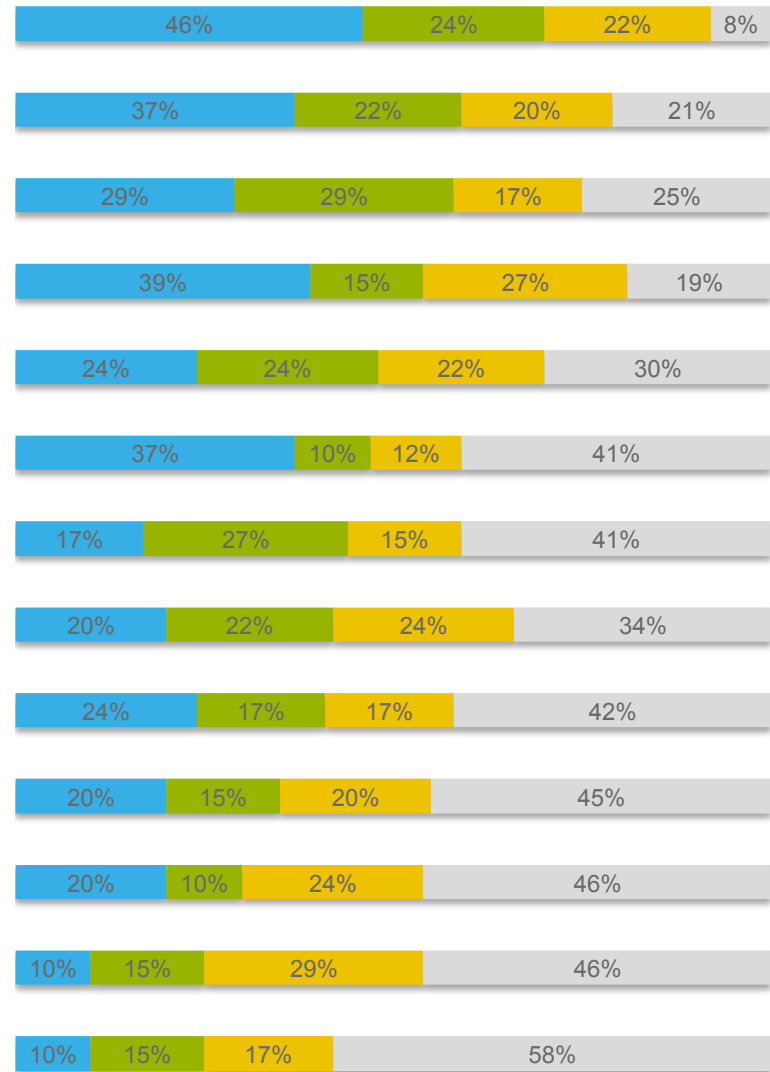
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THE NEW SHARED NARRATIVE

CAVU Research tested three variations of a new narrative statement, each designed to lead stakeholders to the realization that everyone has the right to live in a healthy community.

The new narratives present the world as it can be if our target audiences see themselves in the new future and participate in bringing it to life. It is the overarching story that shapes the way people feel, process information and act.

All three new narratives tested well - and significantly beat the dominant narrative - with one of the three garnering **100% agreement** with 60% of stakeholders selecting as their top choice

The New Narrative

When people have safe, meaningful experiences in nature, their quality of life, health and social wellbeing improves, and in turn, their communities become stronger and more sustainable. All people deserve the opportunity to spend time in nature*, regardless of where they live or their social or economic status, because the more people who connect with the outdoors the more we all benefit.*

*Tested with variations on 'nature,' 'outdoors' and 'outside.'

COMMENTARY ON THE NEW NARRATIVE

“I appreciate the equity component, and I like the idea that we all benefit from more people connecting with the outdoors.”

“[This is good because] it doesn’t set up a competitive dynamic between groups, for example, those with and without access.”

“I get hung up on the word nature. In an urban context, we don’t talk about nature.”

“I like the connection between nature and personal wellbeing, that the opportunity is deserved by everyone, and I also like the connection to the health of the community.”

“I am cautious about terms that may convey privilege (for white people) like nature and outdoors.”

“The focus of “all people deserve the opportunity to spend time in nature” is the core value statement. The impact of the public good in the first sentence; the equity message was helpful. It’s something everybody could agree with.”

“I could see myself in this.”

“This is clear, specific and presented in a positive frame.”

“I work with a lot of urban families and we try not to focus on the negative, so I straight away preferred the [narrative] that wasn’t negatively framed. And I like the messages about inclusivity.”

NARRATIVE DIRECTIONS

While the other two narratives tested did not rate as highly, they each beat the dominant narrative by over 90% and uncovered language that resonated well (and not so well) with stakeholders. These insights will inform slight shifts in language to the final narrative and messaging.

When safe experiences in nature are universal, regardless of anyone's background or zip code, our communities will be healthier and more resilient. To make this happen, creating and encouraging access to welcoming, meaningful experiences outside should be a public priority.*

Second choice overall, 29% selected as most compelling.

When opportunities to have safe, welcoming, meaningful experiences outside are universal, abundant and valued our communities and citizens thrive. Unfortunately, today many Americans face safety, financial and social barriers to enjoying nature, and changing that should become a national priority.*

Lowest rated statement, only 12% selected as most compelling.

*Tested with variations on 'nature,' 'outdoors' and 'outside.'

WORDS TO WATCH

Nature

Seen as far away, grand, something you “go to.” Sounds elitist. Conjures images of undeveloped, isolated places. Resonates the most with “inside the tent” audiences.

Outdoors

The most accessible of the terms to new audiences. Simpler, more traditional language. Seen as less judgmental, less political than other terms. Connotes elements of activity. Resonates the most with urban audiences.

Outside

More expansive term than nature, but less action-oriented. “Right outside the door.” Seen as inclusive of manmade environments. Least popular term tested.

Stewardship

Often linked with ‘conservation’ and both are problematic and poorly defined by new audiences. Inside the tent jargon. Raises questions of if and how time outdoors correlates to future stewardship.

Safe / Safety

Needs context and explanation. Resonates differently for communities of color. Most audiences lack widespread awareness of safety differentials outdoors.

Access

Needs to be paired with examples of why access is an issue, and how lack of access leads to disparities. Most resonant when paired with ‘nature,’ as access to the ‘outside’ has different meaning in an urban setting.

Resilience

Buzz-wordy. Overused. Can be misunderstood. Best to avoid.

Healthy Communities

Concept tests well, but needs definition for some audiences. Showing common threads of personal health, education, and environmental care are important descriptors.

American(s)

Triggers biases towards non-citizens, raises immigration issues. Seen as exclusionary. Use “all people” or “everyone” as alternatives.

The New Narrative

The new narrative is grounded in external research and shaped by the voices of hundreds of stakeholders.

In the most recent set of external interviews, 100% of participants agreed with the new narrative.

The messaging framework is the foundation for all communication intended to advance the new narrative.

It is highly flexible, and allows for Blue Sky to communicate about specific issues and opportunities in their own unique ways, while at the same time reinforcing a common, overarching narrative.



THE NEW NARRATIVE

Long (ish) Version

We believe everyone has the right to live in and feel connected to a healthy community.

Communities thrive when the people within them have opportunities for meaningful experiences outdoors, whether at a nearby park, a garden or on the shores of an ocean. Getting outside connects us to ourselves, to each other and to the world around us, reminding us that we are part of a much bigger story. Building these connections increases people's quality of life, health and social wellbeing, which are benefits everyone deserves.

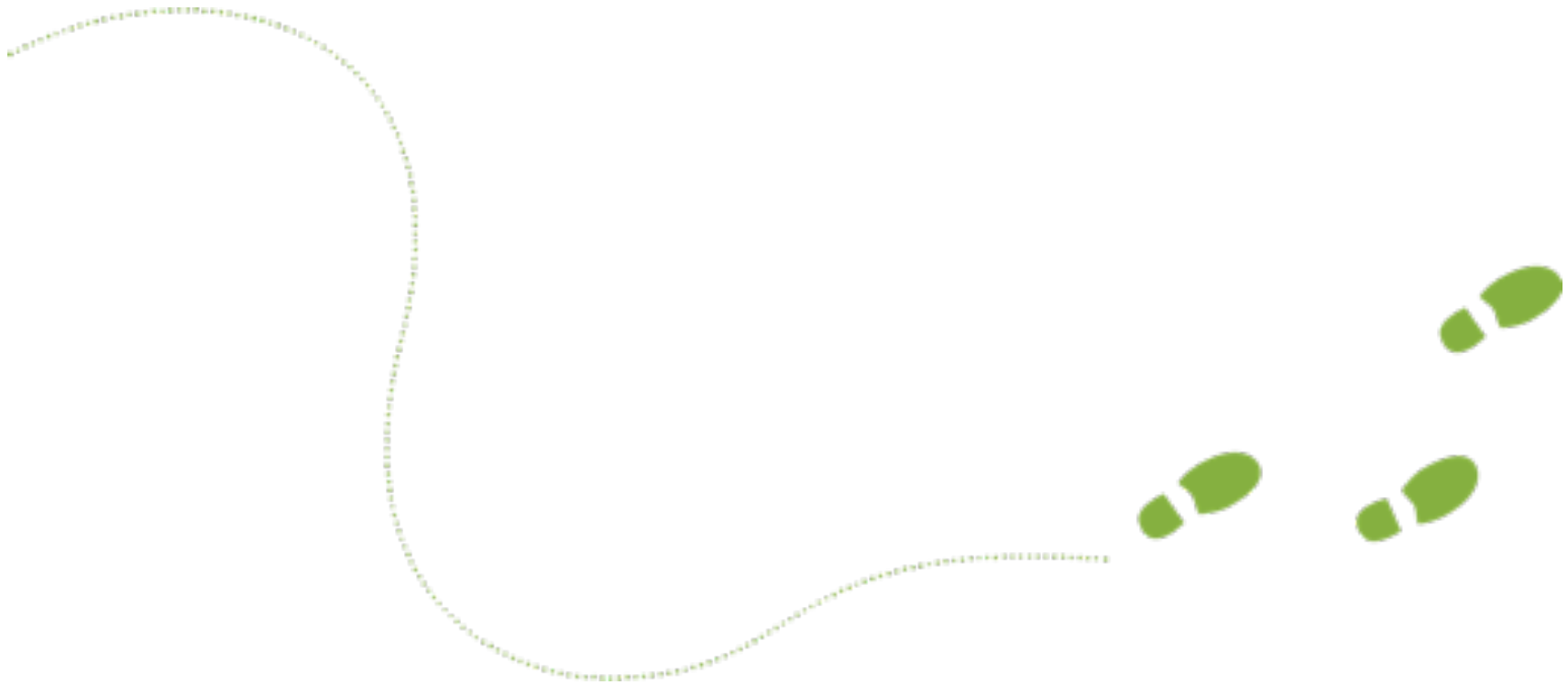
We have a shared responsibility to open the doors to all people, regardless of where they live or their backgrounds, and ensuring their experiences outdoors are positive and rewarding. The more people who connect in this way with nature, the more our communities are strengthened and the more we all benefit.



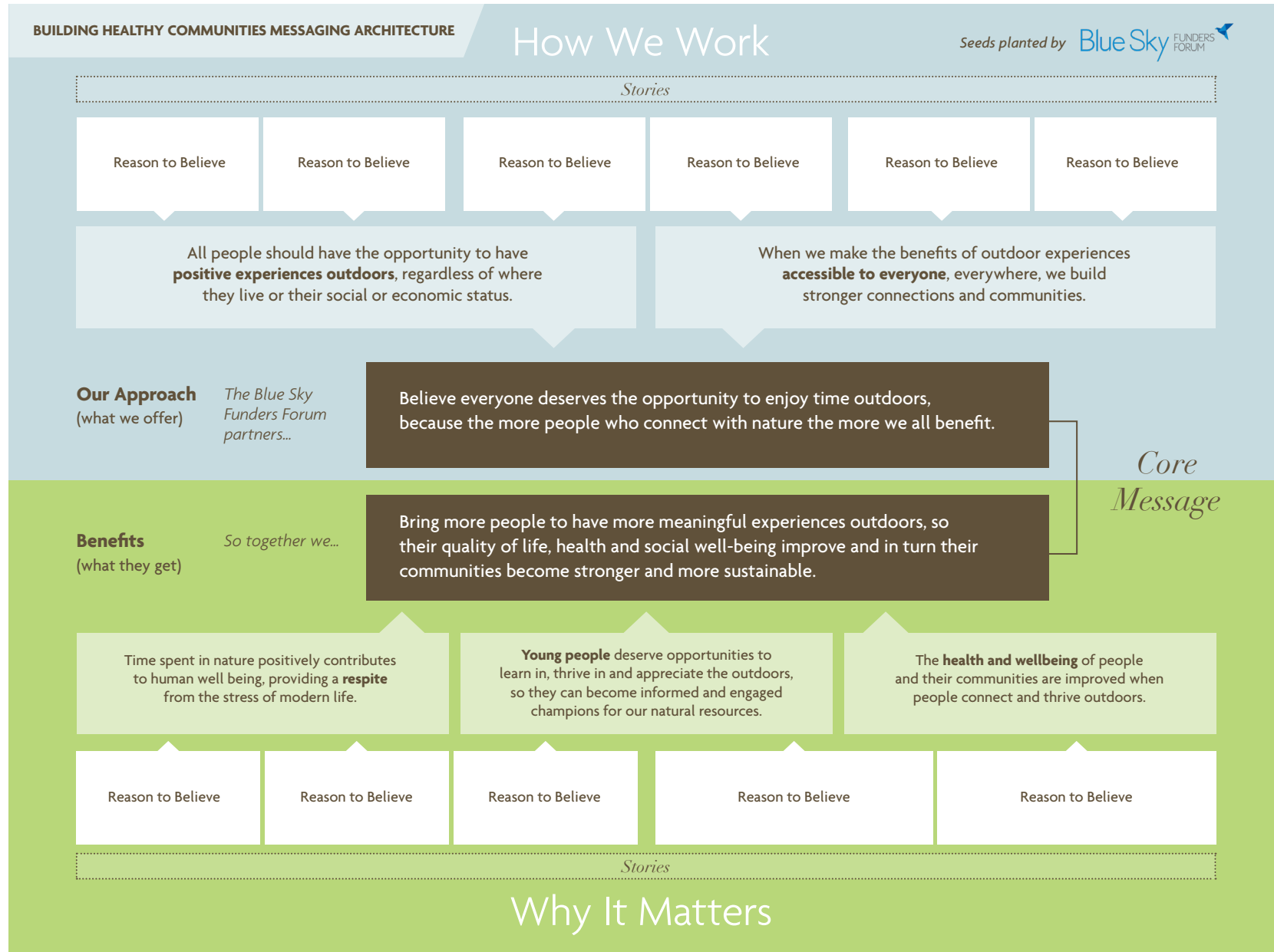
THE NEW NARRATIVE

Long Story Short

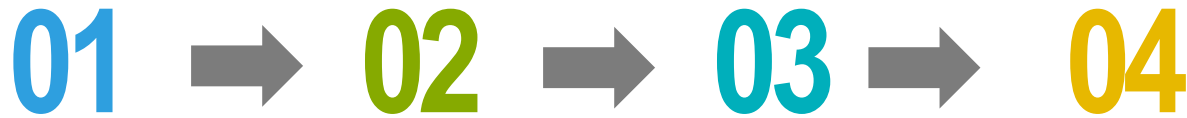
When people have meaningful experiences outdoors their quality of life, health and social wellbeing improve, and in turn their communities become stronger and more sustainable. Everyone deserves the opportunity to enjoy time outdoors, because when people connect with nature we all benefit.



MESSAGE MAP



NARRATIVE + MESSAGING + STORIES



A method for using the narrative model

01 Set the Stage

- + *For each particular issue and audience, determine whether to start conversations with a problem to be solved, an overview of your issue or an opportunity for consideration.*

02 Frame

- + *Frame that issue within one or more of the value statements.*
- + *Develop reasons to believe (data) and stories from your work that amplify the value statements.*

03 Lead into the Core

- + *Lead conversations from those of values into those of narrative / core message.*

04 Conclude

- + *Conclude with a call to action or solution, if appropriate.*

CONNECTING THE NARRATIVE TO YOUR WORK

