

# An Introduction to the Narrative System and the Narrative Ecosystem

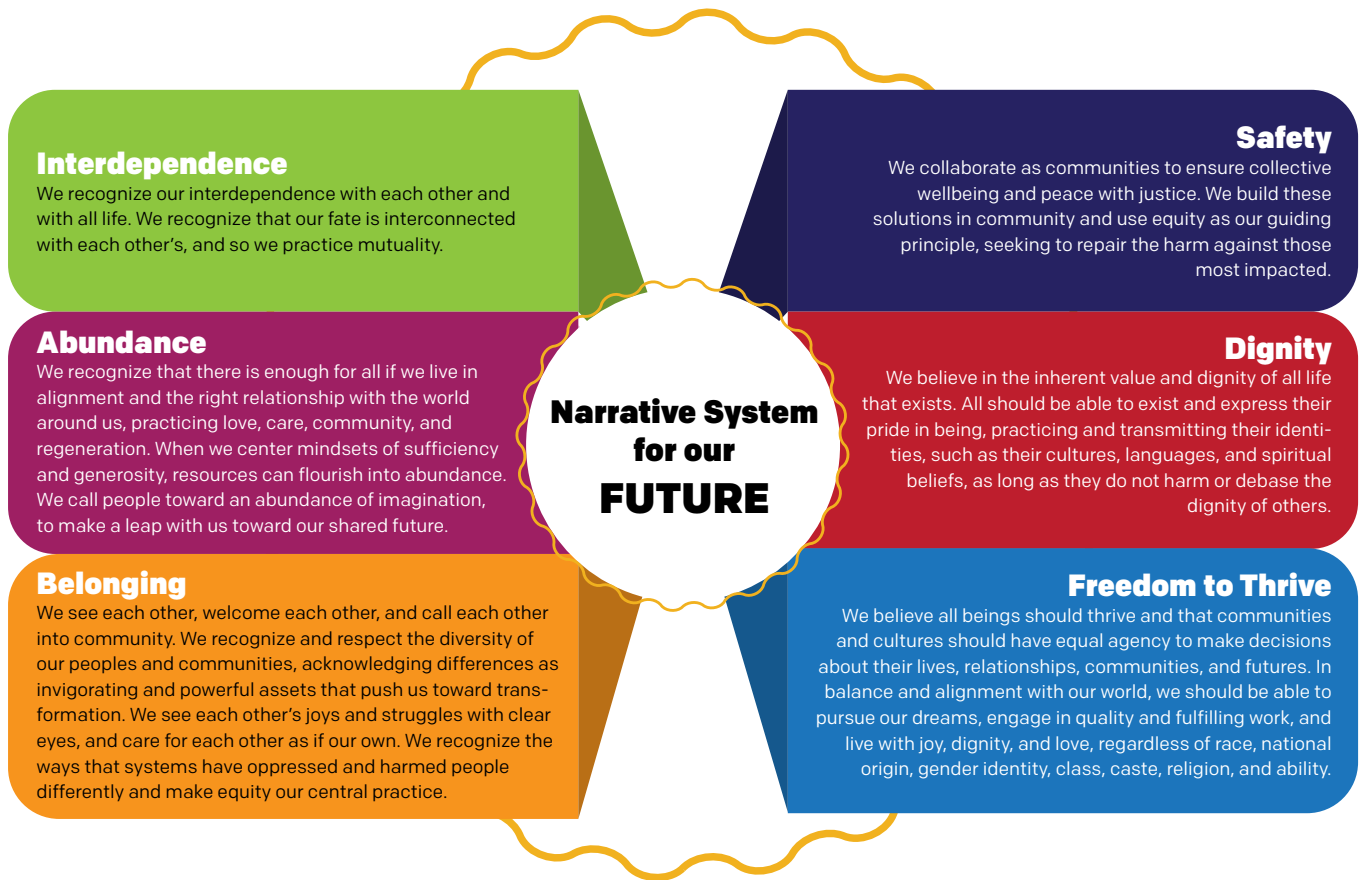
**BECAUSE WE EACH HAVE A PART TO PLAY IN WINNING THE CULTURE**, and because a multiplicity of narratives and approaches are necessary to ensure a thriving world for all, we introduce the frameworks of a narrative system and a narrative ecosystem.

People are moved and activated in different ways, along different timelines, and never just within the context of legislative, electoral, or policy campaigns alone. We have a better chance of building narrative power if we work with each other on different fronts and timelines to move different audiences in the same direction. As a movement, we should aspire to reach people all the time.

As you design your project, use the narrative system framework to help you choose the deep narratives with which your project will align. Use the narrative ecosystem framework to help you think about how your project relates to others' work to collectively move people towards our worldview.

## NARRATIVE SYSTEM

We define a **narrative system** as a set of deep narratives that together describe the worldview we want to activate at a majority level. A narrative system provides a “destination” to ground narrative projects ranging from rapid-response and policy campaigns to cultural strategies and longer-term narrative work. It sets our values, helps us to find alignment and consensus across projects and timelines, and allows us to connect our work with other social movements.



The Butterfly Lab cohort developed a narrative system to challenge the status quo. This system is anchored in six deep narratives: **Interdependence, Abundance, Belonging, Safety, Freedom to Thrive, and Dignity** to inform the narrative strategy work our movements need now. After reading them, ask:

- What one or two deep narratives are most resonant with the work that you are currently doing?
- Which deep narratives would require that you stretch your practices and develop new stories?
- What aligned relationships might you build with partners, collaborators, and/or allies to extend the impact of your collective work?

# Narrative Ecosystem

## OUR MOVEMENT HAS AN ABUNDANCE OF SKILLS, CAPACITIES, AND IDEAS.

Building bridges that facilitate the easeful sharing of visions, strategies, and resources is vital in our movements.

We define a narrative ecosystem as a network of connected individuals and organizations that can share knowledge, expertise, skills, ideas, capacities, and work to advance a narrative system across a diversity of fronts along different timelines.

The framework of a **narrative ecosystem** helps us imagine how we might be able to align ourselves with each other and work together in rapid-response and campaign timelines as well as longer timelines simultaneously.



To develop an ecosystem that prioritizes collaboration, relationality, and power-sharing, start by identifying your own role within it. The following are introductory prompts to which we encourage you to return at each step of your narrative design process. They can help you stay centered while thinking about how to forge stronger relationships.

- \* **Who are you?** Think expansively and acknowledge how you arrived at this present moment. Who helped you? What has inspired and shaped you?

- \* **Who are your people?** There is a Spanish proverb that goes, “Tell me who you walk with and I will tell you who you are.” Consider all of your human and other than human relatives. What are the places, peoples, communities, geographies, and experiences to which you feel connected?
- \* **Where are you going?** What goals are you working toward—personally, culturally, and beyond? What vision of the world motivates you? What do you need to learn and what capacities do you still need to build?
- \* **With whom will you build relationships?** Whose work and goals are complementary to yours? Who might extend your capacities or teach you new capacities? What aligned relationships might you build with partners, collaborators, and/or allies to extend the impact of your collective work?

The [Social Change Ecosystem Map](#) by Deepa Iyer at Building Movement Project is a useful tool for further identifying the texture of particular roles you might hold in building cultural and narrative power.

# Narrative System Worksheet

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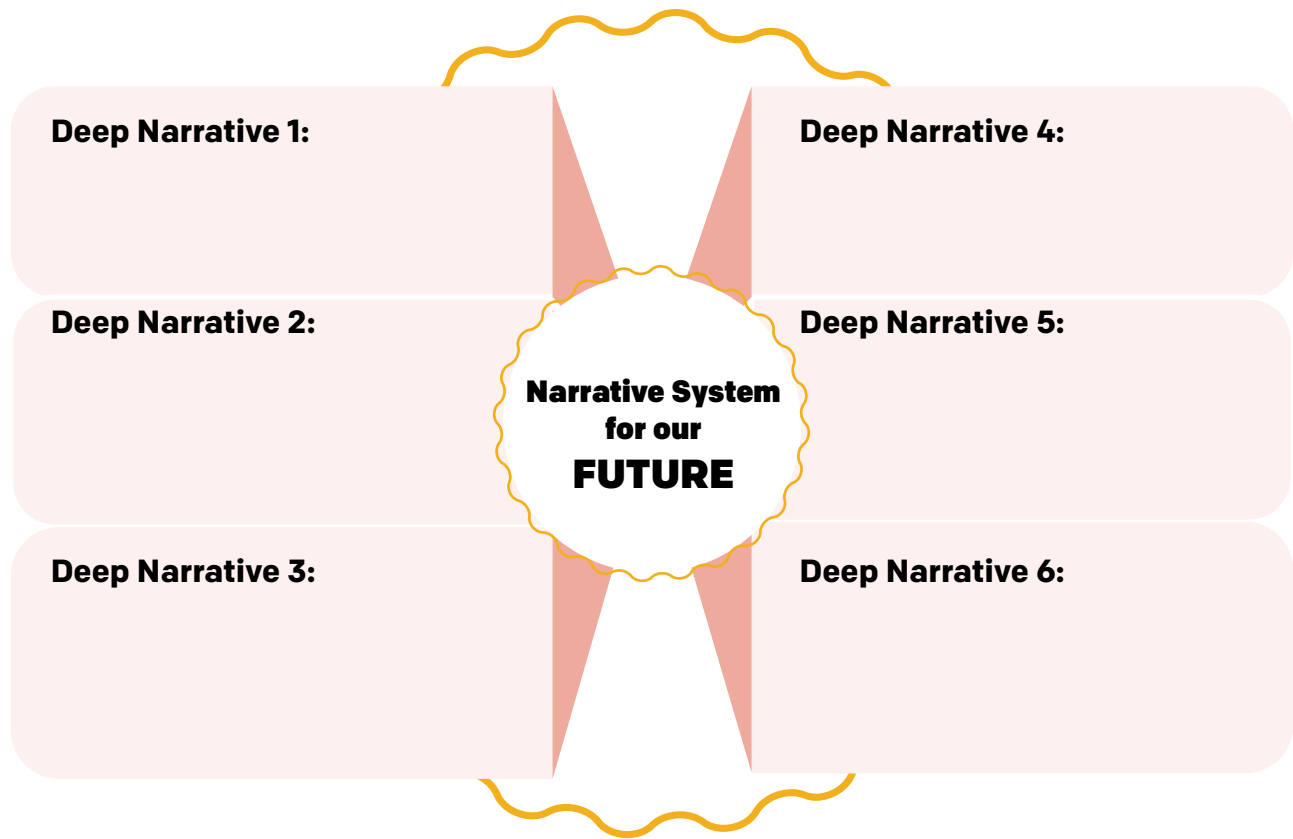
**A NARRATIVE SYSTEM IS A SET OF DEEP NARRATIVES** that together describe the worldview we want to activate at a majority level. It is the aggregate worldview that is generated through all of our deep narratives working in synergy and synchronization with each other. A narrative system provides a “destination” for our work. It sets our values, helps us to find alignment and consensus across projects and timelines, and allows us to connect our work with other social movements. The narrative system is a framework that can provide greater alignment in your field.

This worksheet will help you begin to identify the deep narratives that can form the basis of your own narrative system. We recommend doing this exercise with key stakeholders, whether in your organizations or in your communities, as a Narrative System sets the direction for your narrative strategy work into the future.

As you practice using this worksheet, consider pairing it with the narrative pyramid tool. All of your campaigns and projects should align from top to bottom on narrative pyramids. Your messaging and stories all reinforce and carry your narratives and deep narratives. Your narratives and deep narratives should align to reinforce your narrative system.

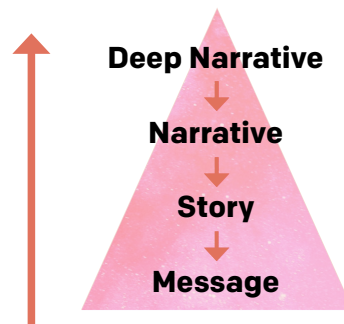
## CONSIDER THESE TWO QUESTIONS TO START

- Q1.** Based on your work and values, which deep narratives would you include in your narrative system?
- Q2.** What worldviews and values would help advance a pro-immigrant future? What combination of deep narratives could produce liberatory cultural conditions for immigrant justice?



All campaigns, projects, activations, and partnerships should align from top to bottom on a narrative pyramid. There should be narratives and deep narratives at the top of each pyramid – which collectively create your narrative system.

### Narrative Strategy Creates Alignment



These two frameworks and tools together (pyramid and system) can be used to iteratively check, strengthen and align your narrative work. Using these two frameworks with practice and rigor can also help you circumvent problems with having your messages and stories contradict your deep narratives.

**Tip:** As you develop your narrative system, be sure to get buy-in and input from your core stakeholders.