

**THE IMPORTANCE OF
BUILDING
NARRATIVE
AND
CULTURAL
POWER**

A Culture Change Primer

September 2020



CARING
ACROSS
GENERATIONS



Table of Contents

Support Statement	1
Introduction: “Why do we need to shift cultural norms around care?”	2
Two Types of Truth	3
Shifting the Norms Around Care	4
Caring Across Generations’ Long-Term Culture Change Goals	5
Our Theory of Culture Change & Narrative Power	5
Building Cultural Presence:	6
Building Cultural Power:	8
Where We Are and What We’ve Learned	10
Looking Ahead	15

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Introduction: “Why do we need to shift cultural norms around care?”

“Over the long term, cultural strategy cracks open, reimagines and rewrites fiercely-held narratives, transforming the shared spaces and norms that make up culture. In addition, it has a role to play in near-term campaigns – helping to shape opinions, beliefs and behaviors that lead to electoral, legislative and policy wins.”

JEFF CHANG, LIZ MANNE, ERIN POTTS.¹

In 2011, Ai-jen Poo and Sarita Gupta founded Caring Across Generations with ambitious goals: to fundamentally change how care and caregiving are valued in this country; to reshape the caring economy; and to build a care infrastructure that would allow us to take care of our families and to live, work, and age with dignity.

They began Caring Across Generations by establishing local Care Councils and by hosting Care Congresses around the country, where they heard stories from care workers, care recipients, and family caregivers. Each Care Congress began with a

¹ [A Conversation about Cultural Strategy](#), Medium, 2018.



simple question: “Can you share a story about someone you care for, or who has cared for you?” An organizer would then model by telling their own care story and ask for others to volunteer their story. Without fail, every meeting would elicit a rich discussion, ranging from a slow crescendo as people came to realize their family’s experiences were actually care stories, to a wave of outpouring and people scrambling to share as they finally found space to let out all they had been bearing alone.

This organizing and listening tour made clear that people, even those in the midst of care crises, did not always identify as caregivers. Although (and probably because) we have been caregiving for centuries – particularly women and women of color – people related to caregiver as a new identity; one that needed to be made visible, colored in, and lifted up as a reason to organize. Caregivers and care recipients needed to embrace this identity and to feel like they belonged to a movement in which they were no longer pitted against each other, but were instead allies within the care ecosystem. Caregivers and care recipients needed to see themselves as part of powerful ‘care squads’ that, when organized together, could demand better for themselves and their loved ones. What Sarita and Ai-jen also saw was that when people heard versions of their story repeated across a large convening, their experiences became validated and legitimized. Participants began to understand that their struggles were not just theirs alone, but indicative of harmful cultural norms and cracks in the system that need to be fixed.

It became increasingly apparent that shifting cultural norms relating to caregiving and caregivers would be an important component of engagement strategies that result in a base of people willing to join together and build power in order to strengthen and reshape the care economy. Thus, even in the campaign’s early life, it was clear that in order to transform the ecosystem and infrastructure for care, we needed to invest in building three types of power:

Political power, or the power to create campaigns that change legislation, move policy, and influence elected officials. (A large part of this work is executed by Caring Across Generations’ 501(c)4, Care in Action);

Narrative and Cultural power, or the power to tell the story of where we are now and to shape and direct the public narrative of where we can be in a way that influences attitudes, behaviors, and cultural norms at scale; and



Modelling power, or the power to dream, ideate, and innovate to push past what we think is currently possible, and to seize actual opportunities to live in the world we want to create, even if they are experimental and small-scale.

All these dimensions of power need to be fueled by strong organizing at the digital, community, and individual levels, toward building power among the organizing base for Caring Across Generations. We have come to call this base the Caring Majority, comprised of caregivers, care workers, and those receiving care.

Two Types of Truth

Culture change is the pursuit of cultural strategies or interventions in culture that intentionally transform harmful dominant narratives in order to impact cultural norms.

Our theory of change is built on the idea that there are two types of truths: factual truths and emotional truths. While factual truths are usually codified in policies, reports, research, and evidence, emotional truths honor and speak to our stories and experiences, and are often marked by the nuance and grey areas of how we feel about things in our hearts or guts. In order to achieve our goals, we need strategies that appeal to both forms of truth and that shift the ways people make meaning and choose to act.

Even while we seek to transform policies and laws, we also need to transform the narrative systems that influence how we feel about things, how we make meaning, and our ability to imagine the world we want to build. We often talk about social change requiring deep systemic shifts, and such shifts must include transforming the dominant narratives that help us define ourselves, our place in the world, what we deserve, and how we make meaning.

While not all dominant narratives are harmful, some perpetuate inequality and injustice. For example, there is a dominant narrative in the United States which holds that poor people are poor largely due to their own behaviors and choices, rather than systemic inequities. Another example is the dominant narrative that some people “deserve” to be Americans and enjoy the perceived benefits associated with this identity, while other people don’t – even though the “undeserving” groups have changed throughout history. There is also a dominant narrative that holds that men



are biologically better suited to lead. These narratives have the potential to shift over time through intentional and consistent interventions in culture,² such as the creation of cultural products that poke holes in existing narratives and hold up new, alternative narratives as “true.” These cultural products should span across pop culture, advertising campaigns, theater, literature, etc.

Shifting the Norms Around Care

Transforming the care economy will take all three of these dimensions of power working in concert. Changing laws cannot be effective without also changing culture; changing culture cannot happen without changing how people identify their experiences and stories, and expanding what they can imagine for themselves and their loved ones. While culture change is a core strategy and important goal in and of itself, it is most powerful and effective when it is resourced and deployed within a strong movement, in close coordination with policy advocacy, communications, and organizing work.

Further, our cultural strategy must continue to be informed by an understanding of the ways that race, class, gender, immigration status, and ability, shape the caregiving experiences of families.

Jeff Chang says, “politics and policy are where some people are some of the time, but culture is where most people are most of the time.”³

Early on, Caring Across Generations brought on a cultural strategist, [Brigit Antoinette Evans](#), to examine dominant social norms related to caregiving and aging, and to create a blueprint for culture change and narrative power building strategy. Looking at

² See glossary at the end for a definition of ‘narrative’ and ‘culture’ and their relationship to each other.

³ Culture is Power: The Center for Cultural Power concept note, revised. Pg1. Spring, 2019



the stories told during the Care Congresses and examining the language used to talk about care work in popular culture, such as “house work” and “help,” it was clear that social norms rooted in a sexist and racist history were partially responsible for the devaluing of caregiving and lack of a comprehensive infrastructure for care.

Caregiving has traditionally been associated with women’s work in the home, and additionally associated with women of color – first during slavery, and now primarily performed by undocumented immigrant women – rendering it undervalued and nearly invisible in our culture. Moreover, the seminal American narrative of individualism has relegated care to largely be considered an individual or family burden, rather than a collective, social issue warranting a collective solution.

These narratives have created deeply and historically entrenched attitudes, norms, and beliefs that shape how we make meaning of caregiving and caregiving needs. Such narratives stand in the way of treating care as a social and political priority. To make long-term change possible, we need to shift these norms and narratives around caregiving and create the cultural conditions necessary for everyone to live, work, and age with dignity.

Caring Across Generations’ Long-Term Culture Change Goals

Based on the learnings from the Care Congresses, and other experiments that involved organizing caregivers and care recipients and hearing their stories, Caring Across Generations developed the following culture change goals, acknowledging that these, like most culture change goals, are ambitious and long-term:

- We move a critical mass of people from thinking about care and caregiving as an individual, private burden to thinking of it as a collective, social issue with a collective solution.
- We move from caregiving and caregivers being invisible and undervalued to being visible and valued in our culture.



Our Theory of Culture Change & Narrative Power

Every moment of major social change requires a collective leap of imagination. Political transformation must be accompanied not just by spontaneous and organized expressions of unrest and risk, but by an *explosion of mass creativity*.⁴

– JEFF CHANG

In order to move hearts and minds in a way that shifts attitudes, behavior, and eventually cultural norms, we need to build both cultural presence and cultural and narrative power. Cultural presence is achieved when we successfully launch our narratives into the world, often through a plethora of media stories, pop culture products, and other cultural products that work at scale. Successful culture change strategies leverage cultural and narrative power in favor of our values, narratives, and the central protagonists of our movement: family caregivers, care recipients, and domestic workers.⁵

⁴ [Culture is Power: The Center for Cultural Power concept note](#), revised. Pg1. Spring, 2019

⁵ Caring Across Generations' theory of culture change is drawn from the work of Ai-jen Poo, Bridgit Antoinette Evans, Rashad Robinson, Janet Kim, Ishita Srivastava and informed by other cultural strategists such as Ryan Sensor, Favianna Rodriguez, Jeff Chang, & Liz Manne.



Building Cultural Presence

Stories are the building blocks of narratives, and dominant narratives have the power to reinforce and redefine social norms. Dominant narratives also contribute to creating the culture of a place and a people. Such narratives have significant impact on beliefs, practices, and behaviors. Dominant narratives can reinforce and support injustice and inequality; and narratives can also create the opportunity for us to imagine and embody solutions that support greater equality, justice, and dignity for everyone.

In order to shift cultural norms around care and to lead people towards a collective solution, we must replace existing stories and narratives about care with new ones that embody the norms, values, and solutions that we want to move people towards. For example, we intervene in those narratives and norms when we bring care from the background of a storyline to the foreground. Caregiving shifts from being the responsibility of a two-dimensional caregiver character to being the work of a strong and supported 'care squad'; from being depicted in a superficial manner to being shown in its full complexity and diversity.

Caring Across Generations accomplishes this by catalyzing and sustaining a 360-degree narrative environment that makes caregiving visible and elevates caregivers – family caregivers, home care workers, and everyone in between – to iconic protagonists in pop culture and other stories. These narratives are directly powered by stories we hear every day through the campaign's organizing work, online through Facebook and caregiver groups, or via our field partners around the country who use storytelling as a power- and movement-building strategy on the ground. We create this narrative environment by **creating and catalyzing stories at scale**, with the goal of shifting norms and attitudes among a critical mass of people.

Stories matter. Representation matters. Seeing one's own experience and identity reflected on TV screens and our social media feeds, validates experiences and enables those who may feel invisible to feel seen, valued, less isolated, and **even powerful**. When we replace existing stories with new ones, or existing protagonists with ones who weren't previously at the center of our stories and pop culture products (caregivers, for example), we literally flip the script, shifting power to caregivers and



focusing on their real stories. This is how we envision and create new cultural narratives.

It is critical that instead of fighting only narratives that we believe to be harmful and offensive, we catalyze and create new narratives that center on our values and solutions, and offer people meaningful opportunities to believe that our narratives and the solutions contained in them are both possible and worth fighting for.

This insight from our partners at Take Action, Minnesota validates and informs this piece of our strategy:

“We won't win as much as we need to win if we can't expand what people believe is possible and really unleash a radical imagination in our people . . . For me and in Minnesota and in Minneapolis, I think we have gotten very clear and we're very unconfused about the fact that we can win as many things as we want along the way, but if we're not doing it in a way that expands the story and changes the story, we're basically in the same spot. So one example of this, how we got it wrong, you know, when we worked to defeat the voter ID amendment in Minnesota . . . we did some polling and what we found is that the most effective way to get people to vote no on voter ID was to talk about how much it's gonna cost them. So we talked about the cost, about your taxes going up, about your pocketbook issues, and we defeated it.

We are still fighting voter ID in Minnesota because we actually didn't move a narrative that said, "Voter ID is wrong. It's undemocratic. It is designed to exclude people from our democracy and it's not in line with our values." So we won a campaign, but we're still fighting the same fight because we didn't actually change the story and expand what people thought about our democracy and how they understood these attacks . . . What then happens is



you sort of move your narrative in public in a way that creates choice points. I'm not trying to fight point by point the dominant narrative and say it's wrong.

Actually, what you need to do is take your narrative and animate it in public life via communication, via art, via protest, via conversations. You're saying to people, "Now choose this," and that's the thing that gets it to stick.

And so I think an example of how we've seen that happen has been the Fight for \$15 where when \$15.00 an hour was a thing that people put on the table. Everyone went wild. "That's totally ludicrous." Nobody could imagine \$15.00 an hour, and then you saw working people, hourly workers, black and brown hourly workers going on strike. And we all saw the images of it and we all saw the courage of people across the country. And you had to look at that and say, "Am I with them or am I not?" And we chose them, and so that's the type of stuff that we've been doing to actively change the dominant narrative and begin to tell a story about who we are to that extent as possible."
– Elianne Farhat, Take Action, Minnesota.⁶

The range of activities we pursue to fulfill this part of our theory of culture change is wide and vast.

In order to work towards a 360-degree narrative environment we:

CATALYZE: Seed new stories, and shape existing stories by consulting on TV, digital media, and film storylines on caregiving, aging, and long-term care.

COLLABORATE: Collaborate with storytellers, artists, producers, and advertising executives to co-produce story content for mass distribution.

CREATE: Leverage audience insights, digital storytelling techniques, and insights from the worlds of marketing and advertising to provide people with a

⁶ Interviews with PERE, 2019-2020.



vision of what this changed world could look like, with creative and imaginative on-ramps to see themselves in that vision.

CAPITALIZE: We produce digital campaigns and events that leverage existing pop culture content and influencers to engage people from fan communities and our target audience online. This tactic enables us to achieve depth of engagement and works concurrently with our campaign communications and digital organizing.

It is important to note that while this is the range of activities we have explored, tested, and identified, we cannot create a 360-degree environment on our own, or at our current resource levels. Cross-sector and cross-movement collaborations are critical.

Building Cultural Power

In addition to populating the culture with better, more nuanced stories about caregiving and intergenerational relationships, it is also important that we simultaneously and intentionally build cultural power in favor of our values and narratives, led by the people we center in our work. We especially focus on those who comprise our Caring Majority, because their identities result in them being doubly invisible, such as people with disabilities and immigrant caregivers. Our strategies for building cultural power manifest at the national and local levels and across many spheres.

When it comes to cultural strategy and power building, the interplay between national-level tactics and local work are many, non-linear, and at their best, reciprocal. Culture is dynamic. It is created, reinforced, and transformed through mainstream pop culture. In turn, pop culture is influenced by Hollywood and other powerful cultural institutions, such as corporate brands, advertising agencies, sports arenas, and religious institutions.

Culture can also be reinforced or transformed in homes, schools, through dinner table conversations, and through interactions with friends and strangers – both in person and online. When shifts in narrative are embodied by organized groups of people and movements (through storytelling, art, music, digital actions, etc.), especially by those



who are most impacted by the issues at hand, they have the potential to change culture, thereby transforming attitudes, social norms, narratives, and behavior.

Our approach to building cultural power is bottom-up and top-down. We work with collaborators and local partners to build cultural power through five strategies:

- 1. Collaborating closely with our field partner organizations to run storytelling and art-making trainings and campaigns that empower people from our base to share their stories and create cultural products and advance advocacy goals.**

These engagement strategies, where individuals and activists participate in making signs, music, and art, serve as leadership-development and movement-building tools, as well as a way to advance legislative and advocacy goals.

Caring Across Generations looks for opportunities for those stories and products to be centered in pop culture products and mainstream conversations, and scaled across the narrative ecosystem, either by introduction into a TV storyline, inclusion in a pop culture event, or by featuring in a large-scale documentary or media project.

- 2. Investing in developing state- or region-specific cultural strategies and tactics that are particularly relevant to a specific geographical context that we have identified through work with field partner organizations.**

States and regions often speak a distinct cultural language, reflected through food, music, celebrity attachment, sports teams, and popular media formats. While many of the narratives around care are present at the national level, they also have specific local cultural and social norms and narratives. When we identify opportunities specific to the context of a state or a local community, we target the nuanced iterations of those narratives as they live and breathe in particular places.

When resources and capacity allow, it is strategic to work with local cultural practitioners – the people closest to the problem – to develop a specific cultural strategy tailored to resonate with people in that region or state, and to



mobilize, energize, and empower them to join the movement for care infrastructure.

3. Working to organize allies in the entertainment industry, the advertising industry, and the theater world around our issue.

Since these cultural spheres play a large role in creating products that are culture-defining, it is critical that we regularly convene and build relationships with people from these industries in a way that cuts through the usual divisions that usually exist between social justice movements and corporate entities.

We focus our time and capacity on building transformational partnerships across the narrative ecosystem, including with entertainment executives, showrunners, writers, advertising agencies, filmmakers, multimedia artists and designers, actors, creative directors, innovators, and game designers.

In order to build cultural power for our base and for the values and narratives we want to put out into the world, we identify and organize influential allies, such as thought leaders, celebrities, and others with cultural and political influence, and powerful cohorts of people touched by care and engage them in considering our solutions. When we are successful, thought leaders and influencers join us as creative collaborators, share their own care stories, and become ambassadors for our campaigns. Music and sports are two cultural arenas where we would like to grow the capacity to collaborate.

Beginning in 2017, Caring Across Generations began developing a transformational cross-industry partnership with creatives at The Second City, an improv troupe and training school based in Chicago, IL.

Caring Across Generations and The Second City began exploring ways to support and empower caregivers via improv. The Second City had experience developing improv workshops for various groups, and Caring Across Generations had expertise in what caregivers need and an interest in providing respite, community, and leadership development to our base of caregivers. Most importantly, our two organizations shared values, a vision of the future, and a comfort with experimentation.



Our partnership led to the creation of the Improv for Care program, which has since had three iterations and is ready to be scaled across hospital systems and caregiver networks. Like most transformational partnerships, our work with The Second City has continued to yield fruit, including a collaboration on their narrative testing product, Brandstage.

4. Contributing to changing the rules of cultural production.

While most of our work in the entertainment industry is focused on partnership-development and collaboration, it is also clear to us that in order to get nuanced and authentic stories told about care that maintain a strong lens on race, gender, class, ability, and immigration status, we need a shift in who decides which stories get told and a corresponding shift in which writers and directors tell our stories.

The primary mechanism through which we engage in this work is through our membership and participation in a collective called Storyline Partners, a diverse collective of organizations that collaborates with the entertainment industry to promote authentic, accurate, and equitable cultural narratives in television and film.

This collective provides us with opportunities to consult on storylines, scripts, and edits of existing TV and film content, as well as proactively training executives and creatives at the studio and show levels. Caring Across Generations is a founding member of the collective.

5. Deeply integrating and partnering with movements that intersect with ours, such as the movements for disability rights, gender equality and justice, immigrant freedom, labor rights, and racial justice.

Cultural change does not happen in a vacuum. Intersectionality is critical to shifting culture over the long-term. Changing the narrative around care requires



building power across issue areas because we know that ableism, racism, sexism, xenophobia, and all forms of prejudice play a role in who gets access to the resources they need in order to care for their loved ones.

The focal point of our intersectional culture change work is our #CareForAll initiative in partnership with National Domestic Workers Alliance, which aims to create a new vision where care is equitable, anti-racist, and accessible to all - a world where care exists at the center of our economy, democracy, and society. Under the #CareForAll umbrella, we are illuminating caregiver stories, with an emphasis on BIPOC, low-income, and male caregivers, through various content mediums, with the goal of creating support for immediate and long-term collective solutions.

Our collaborators include diverse comedians and allied organizations who work with us to curate and produce creative, humorous, and mindful content that illustrates the experience of caregivers and those receiving care in whole and nuanced ways. The resulting visual content (videos, animations, gifs, memes, and illustrated images) for social media, demonstrates the connections between care and other social justice issues, and highlights the urgency of investing in social safety net infrastructure. The visual content showcases community care and the real lives of caregivers, seniors, and people with disabilities who are struggling to cope with the pressures of the current moment. This intersectional approach to storytelling acknowledges the struggles of caregivers, links caregiving and racial justice and gender justice issues, celebrates community care, and seeds the narrative that a new world centered around equitable care is possible.



Where We Are and What We've Learned

Caring Across Generations has spent the last seven years developing and honing our cultural strategy, testing our hypotheses, experimenting with different strategic directions and storytelling mechanisms, failing forward, building partnerships in the pop culture arena, listening to and building power with our field partners, and listening to caregivers to understand their needs and learn about the nuances of the norms and attitudes towards care that we want to shift. In the process, we have achieved a modest measure of cultural presence and power, however short of what we know is possible.

Parallel to this, our campaign has been developing a policy solution to our nation's care challenges, Universal Family Care (UFC), towards which we seek to drive cultural momentum. With UFC as our North Star, we are poised to take our cultural strategy to the next stage, achieving sufficient scale and depth to shift norms around care, elevate a national narrative in which care is a collective, social responsibility, and build power around a solution that speaks to the needs of all families.

Some of the key lessons that are propelling us into our next phases of cultural work include:

- 1. A deeper understanding of our primary audience.**

Our primary audience for cultural strategy are family caregivers between the ages of 35-60. We hold this group at the center of our culture change work. This group includes caregivers and employers of domestic workers, and while they are a central part of the care ecosystem, they do not have a lot of dedicated advocacy taking place on their behalf. They are also a large percentage of the total population, and exist across class, race, and political divides. Sixty percent of this group is comprised of women.



Why is this group both the source of the narratives we amplify and the core audience for those narratives? Although they are such a large group, they often do not think of themselves as belonging to the “caregiver” identity, so they afford a big opportunity for organizing and power building. Their stories, voices, and ideas for solutions feed the development of our narrative and culture change work.

We arrived at clarity about our primary audience after much experimentation, including experiments in intergenerational culture change strategies. One takeaway from earlier work was that Millennials in general felt too distant from the issues of caregiving for us to successfully make them a key target audience. However, as demographics have shifted and a third of all family caregivers are now millennials, we have added them back in as a specific group that we activate and engage at strategic moments. As we have found that Millennials are so saturated with targeted content and advocacy asks, we focus most of our energy on a Gen X and Baby Boomer caregiving audience. Additionally, some of our strategies and tactics are informed by the Caring Majority: seniors, people with disabilities, care workers, and others connected to care in some way.

In the context of cultural strategy and tactics, and the narrative infrastructure needed to implement these strategies, it is useful to keep in mind that while everyone enjoys and consumes media, art, and popular culture in some form, and while reaching audiences at scale is important to shift cultural norms, it is fallacious to try to reach all audiences with all narrative content, all the time.

Within our primary audience, some additional strategic targets include sandwich generation caregivers, male caregivers and millennial caregivers. Interestingly, forty percent of caregivers are men, and a third of family caregivers are currently millennials.

2. We need to know where people are before we can meet them there.

Through experimentation, focus groups, and narrative research, we have gained deep insights into people’s attitudes about care, as well as tested to see which narratives and specific themes move people on this issue. These include:



Attitudinal insights about care: In 2017-2018 we conducted focus groups around the country to test our hypotheses about caregiving attitudes and norms. We talked to current and past family caregivers, as well as people who are between the ages of 35-65 who are not caregivers. Some of the insights we received were new and surprising, and some reaffirmed what we already knew. For example:

- **People don't think of care and caregiving as an identity,** and caregivers feel like they are relatively invisible in cultural products.
- **Most participants see caregiving as an individual responsibility, or a family responsibility at most, not a collective or social issue.** However, while some acknowledged the role that a community could play in caregiving, many couldn't envision it. African Americans were farthest along in seeing caregiving as a community activity and responsibility. They were also closest to feeling that there should be a public solution to family care needs.
- **While caregiving is hard work, referring to it as a "job" makes people uncomfortable.** "Job" implies a burden that also feels transactional, neither of which describe the emotional bonds of a caregiving relationship.

Narrative insights about care: We took the attitudinal insights from our focus groups and worked with The Second City through a market research product they offer called Brandstage. We worked with their improv team to develop narrative and story ideas that they tested out on live groups of our target audience, sandwich generation caregivers, over two days. Based on how the audience in the room responded, the performers refined those ideas in real time to see what moved people the most. The narrative insights and story ideas from that process are informing all our storytelling work. Insights included:

- **People who are on the cusp of becoming caregivers for their parents have a lot of anxiety about the ways that familial roles change as they start becoming caregivers for people who had previously cared**



for them. They are worried about this role reversal, and their relationships with their siblings.

- **People want more stories that illustrate the benefits of multi-generational living for children, seniors, and everyone in between.** This was especially true for Asian-American participants during our focus group process.
- **People are very hungry for creative, humorous ways to enter into difficult conversations with their families** about planning for care, sickness, aging, finances, caregiving, end-of-life, etc. For this audience, creative content that modeled these conversations would be a great way to get people to start thinking, talking, and planning for their caregiving journeys.
- **Comedy & humor moves people on our issues!**

3. We need scale and depth to build power from the ground up.

Our work in support of our field partners, building cultural and narrative power at the local level, has solidified our hypothesis that we need scale and depth to achieve cultural impact that supports our strategies and builds power from the ground up. While we will continue to work at the national level, we learned that we need to dig in and expand our work at the state and local level, leveraging cultural strategy and tactics to build power amongst the Caring Majority, and vice-versa, continuously channeling their voices, stories, and seeds of imagined futures into mainstream narratives in pop culture, media, and art.

Collaboration between our culture change team, our organizing and field team, and our field partners has yielded some promising results that we would like to build on and scale. Some examples of these results include:

A shared identity for the Caring Majority: In 2019, we engaged a team of artists with expertise in cultural organizing to leverage art to create a movement identity across our diverse partners and members. Their efforts culminated in a two-day art and signage build at our annual field convening.



In the development phase, Caring Across Generations' culture change director, director of organizing and field, the two cultural organizers, and key field partners with a specific interest in cultural strategies, worked together to develop a design lexicon that included visual icons, a color palette, and slogans that could have specific relevance to the field members, but also have consistency across the country.

The first implementation phase involved sharing these materials and running an art-making workshop at Caring Across Generations' field convening in November 2019. Over two days, many members from across our field partner organizations created signs and banners that were then distributed to the whole group and used in subsequent advocacy actions in various states. In this first experimental phase, field partner members felt a clear sense of identification with and belonging to Caring Across Generations, and a clear sense of the common goal that the Caring Majority is working towards, whether they were seniors, family caregivers, people with a disability, or domestic workers.

Effective engagement through the CARE documentary: In 2016-2017, we were one of the core campaign partners for the production and dissemination campaign for the documentary film, CARE. This documentary, made by Deirdre Fishel and Tony Heriza, presents a touching portrayal of the relationships at the center of a U.S. care system that is unprepared for a booming elder population.

In addition to playing a role in shaping the film's narrative (from choosing protagonists through post-production), Caring Across Generations helped facilitate use of the film as an organizing and power building tool for our field partner organizations. The filmmakers raised money to hire a campaign strategist to develop a social impact campaign to accompany the documentary, and Caring Across Generations' culture change team began working closely with the filmmakers and their impact strategist. We quickly identified some of our field partners, including Take Action Minnesota, Hand in Hand, and the New York Caring Majority, and other affiliates in Atlanta and Illinois, who were keen to use the film in their organizing and leadership development efforts.



Over a two-year period, Caring Across Generations and the key field partners worked closely with the film's team to identify, test, and evaluate tactics to leverage the film for their efforts. The main tactics included in-person community screenings, digital screenings and social media activation aimed to power action online. Due to the somewhat bleak tone of the film, it worked best as a community screening followed by a guided discussion. We found that people who had watched the film felt compelled to share their personal stories of caregiving and were hungry to learn about and sign up to join a movement focused on solutions to the care crisis that the film portrayed.⁷

Here is what some of our field partner organizers had to say about the film:

“CARE was central to the launch of the New York Caring Majority Campaign fighting for quality jobs, a family care tax credit, and ultimately . . . universal long-term care. It's been an incredible organizing tool. The film gives the audience permission to talk about their own personal experiences. It's a critical part of what we need. We have to have the conversations in public in order to move the movement forward.” – Zahara Zahav, Community Organizer with Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, a part of the New York Caring Majority.

The New York Caring Majority campaign has held eight screenings to date, with five more planned in the next few months. Campaign leaders invite friends, family, and neighbors to see the film, then they talk about issues, both at the personal and political levels. They found that, after screening the film, people are better able to see how their own experience is connected to larger issues—and are more interested in taking action to make change. – New York Caring Majority⁸

⁷ Driver, Sahar. Care Engagement: Final Evaluation Report.

⁸ Driver, Sahar. Care Engagement: Final Evaluation Report.



“This has been massive for our recruitment in New York state. It has been a great conversation starter in the Hudson valley. We’ve hosted about 20-30 screenings, and this has become a fundamental piece of our core organizing strategy. It’s the showing rather than telling -- we screen the 30-minute cut of the film and then have a conversation after. . . It opens people up -- people share their story right after. So people come into the conversation from an emotional place, not an intellectual place. Someone called Jane came to a care screening, and had never been active before that, but after watching it she said, ‘that movie is my life,’ and suddenly she wanted to share her story with other people.” – Hand in Hand

Take Action Minnesota wanted to help bring together a multiracial, age-diverse, able-bodied and disabled group of paid and family caregivers, students and consumers to hear from one another and “find common ground.” Hani Ali, the Home Care Organizer at Take Action Minnesota noted: “while we had lots of disagreement, we all agreed we have to have these conversations.” She explained that the screenings really brought people together and created “good tension” in the room. The screenings also generated enthusiasm for their Care Economy Program.

Improv for Care program: When we collaborated with the Second City in 2017 to create the Improv for Care program, we piloted it with the Pilipino Workers Center in Los Angeles, CA, one of our partners via the National Domestic Worker Alliance affiliate network. The participants responded enthusiastically to the training. During the evaluation, participants reflected that in addition to providing them with practical skills to use in their care work, the improv training also built the participants’ sense of agency and contributed to their leadership development as organizers in their community.





Looking Ahead

We will continue to experiment and learn, but to achieve true impact, we know that we need to increase the scale of our culture change efforts. We need to expand our capacity significantly so we can scale the reach and impact of all our work, with a particular focus on the following:

- 1. Continuing to invest capacity and expertise in building out the field of culture change and narrative strategy.**

From its inception, Caring Across Generations has invested significantly in building out the still-youthful field of culture change, composed of cultural strategists, artists and storytellers, and foundations. This has included sharing Caring Across Generations' strategy and expertise from successes and failures with the broader field; sharing tools and tactics for audience research; presenting at convenings, public and private; and, engaging in theoretical discussions about the distinction between culture, narrative, and story. At times it has included sharing resources and partnerships and collaborating on joint campaigns; experimenting with and sharing methods for monitoring and evaluating the impact of this work; and mentoring organizations who are keen to begin doing this work. Perhaps most importantly, it has involved debating and agreeing on meta-narratives that serve all our common goals across movements.

Whether through convenings, presentations, reports, or one-on-one conversations, it is important that we maintain this aspect of our work so that we can continue to experiment and iterate, and collectively raise the standards of impact and success for the field at large.

- 2. Expanding integration of culture and narrative strategies at the state and local level, to build power and to shift specific cultural norms as they manifest at the local level.**



As an example, our ballot initiative campaign in Maine in 2018, in which our 501(c)4 Care In Action engaged, indicated that while Mainers agreed that there was a clear need for a solution to their care challenges, strongly entrenched cultural attitudes and norms stood in the way of the solution we were promoting, including a deep mistrust of government and a strong resistance to thinking of care as something that should be a public good.

As an experiment, we would like to select a state that we consider strategically placed (based on our state-based organizing and/or legislative work) to pilot a 360-degree cultural strategy over a one- to three-year period, with the goal of encouraging the cultural conditions needed to advance our overall policy goals.

We hope to bring a cultural organizer on board to scale our collaboration with field partners to integrate cultural tactics into their work. A person in this role would also work to build the capacity of our partner organizations to harness the relevant narratives for their audiences and use cultural products strategically. Such an organizer would also spearhead experiments seeking scale and depth.

3. Building out more robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks and mechanisms.

We need to create, test, and refine more robust methods for monitoring and evaluating our outcomes, both in the short-term (campaign and project-specific) and in the long-term, so that we can track and measure our progress towards achieving our long-term culture change goals and building narrative power in favor of our values and solutions.



Glossary

Story: 'A story is discrete and contained; it has a beginning, middle, and end. Stories recount a particular series of events that occur in a particular place and time, and often contain structural archetypes such as a protagonist, a problem, a path, and a payoff. From creation myths to creative means of preserving cultural tradition and communal memory, storytelling is the common language of human experience. Stories transmit a society's ideas, beliefs, behaviors, humor, style, and trends from one person to another, inherited and imitated memes that collectively create the culture we live in.'⁹

Narrative: 'Narratives are often described as a collection or system of related stories that are articulated and refined over time to represent a central idea or belief...What tiles are to mosaics, stories are to narratives. The relationship is symbiotic; stories bring narratives to life by making them relatable and accessible, while narratives infuse stories with deeper meaning. Narratives infuse individual stories with deeper meaning by connecting many stories together to form the basis of how groups of people think about themselves and others.'¹⁰

'Dominant narratives define and reinforce social norms – who is “us” and who is “them,” what is true and what is false, what is proper and what is improper, what can be done and what cannot be done. Narratives, whether dominant or alternative, can produce and reproduce injustice and inequity, or they can create possibilities for more equity, justice, and freedom for all.'¹¹

Culture: 'Culture has two definitions: (1) The prevailing beliefs, values and customs of a group; a group's way of life. (2) A set of practices (including all forms of storytelling and art-making) that contain, transmit, or express ideas, values, habits and behaviors between individuals and groups. So culture is the sum total of a group of people's prevailing beliefs, values, customs and way of life as well as the practices that transmit culture. Cultures, like the narratives that define and are being defined by them, can produce and reinforce injustice and inequity, or they can create increasing possibilities for greater inclusion, equity and justice for all.'¹²

⁹ [Toward New Gravity: Charting a Course for the Narrative Initiative](#), 2017.

¹⁰ [Toward New Gravity: Charting a Course for the Narrative Initiative](#), 2017.

¹¹ [A Conversation about Cultural Strategy](#), Medium, 2018.

¹² [A Conversation about Cultural Strategy](#), Medium, 2018.