

ALIGNING
EFFORTS
TO GROW
OUR

*restorative solidarity
non-extractive care wellbeing
guarantee just regenerative
inclusive equitable next*

ECONOMY
MOVEMENT
FROM THE
MARGINS
TO THE
MAINSTREAM

may 2026

Beloved
Economies



IMPERATIVE 21

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ECONOMY MOVEMENT FROM THE MARGINS TO THE MAINSTREAM

may 2026

AUTHORS

Joanna Levitt Cea • Jess Rimington
Mikah Sanchez • Jane Mantey

EDITORS

Akira Nakahara • Madeline Hay • Sonia Sarkar
Trevor Smith • Yewande Addie

DATA ANALYSIS

Hafsa Mustafa | Just Insights

INTERVIEW CODING

Madeline Hay

INTERVIEWERS

Joanna Levitt Cea • Akira Nakahara • Sonia Sarkar
Jess Rimington • Anna Chrysopoulou • Amanda Janoo

COPYEDIT

Nicholas Taylor | Grit City Creative

*An assessment with
leaders of over 70
organizations across
our movement in the U.S.
of how we're communicating
and what's needed for
narrative breakthrough*

Beloved
Economies



BLIS COLLECTIVE

IMPERATIVE 21

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Executive Summary

3 Background & Purpose

5 Our Approach

9 Key Findings

- A. Interviewees use many different terms to name the economy they are working toward
- B. Interviewees' communications materials reflect six key patterns that show more narrative coherence than their terminology suggests
- C. Most interviewees feel pressure to code-switch, adapting their language for funders, mainstream audiences, and institutional actors
- D. Many interviewees prioritize building power within their own communities and movement ecosystem
- E. In the U.S. national context, interviewees see distinct narrative opportunity in affordability, anti-oligarchy sentiment, and the economy being broken
- F. Fragmentation at the language level, yet cohesion at the values level: Nearly half of interviewees believe the most important narrative shift is from individuality toward collective care

27 What's Working in Achieving Narrative Wins

35 What's Not Working

36 Our Recommendations

- A. Invest in and build narrative infrastructure
- B. Act on the fact that aligning on economy has cross-movement significance
- C. Experiment with bold language; the gains might be great

Appendices

- A. [A slice of our movement\(s\): Who we engaged](#)
- B. [List of interviewees that informed this report](#)
- C. [Full textual analysis report by BLIS Collective](#)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the result of a multi-organization learning effort to better understand the narrative conditions helping, and limiting, efforts to move economic transformation ideas into broader U.S. public life.

We focused on learning from practitioners across a diverse range of organizations working in the U.S. inclusive economies ecosystem. Their organizations are advancing economic justice and transformation in wide-ranging and multifaceted ways—from running guaranteed income pilots; incubating worker-owned cooperatives; mobilizing financing for community-serving birth centers; facilitating the rematriation of ancestral Indigenous lands; offering alternative MBA curriculum; scaling shared ownership of companies, residential communities, and local shopping centers; and so much more.

Through 74 interviews with leading practitioners, as well as textual analysis of their organizations' communications materials, we focused on exploring three core questions:

What narratives are currently shaping the inclusive economies space?

What effect do they have on different audiences?

Are there opportunities to align and amplify narratives that can drive transformative change?

This work begins from a simple belief: the economy is not a niche issue. It shapes whether people can afford housing, raise families, access care, build stability, and imagine a future. At a time of deep economic strain, political volatility, and widening inequality, the question of who the economy works for—and what alternatives feel possible—matters far beyond this field. Our research reinforces what many strategists increasingly recognize: **Greater narrative power and public visibility for economic transformation ideas could strengthen broader efforts around democracy, justice, ecological repair, and shared well-being.**

Toward that aim, this report highlights six key findings that point both to significant narrative opportunity and to recurring constraints within the field:

- A. Interviewees use many different terms, 47 in total, to name the economy they are working toward;
- B. Interviewees' communications materials reflect six key patterns that show more narrative coherence than their terminology suggests, especially around power, collaboration, and systems change;
- C. Most interviewees feel pressure to code-switch, adapting their language for funders, mainstream audiences, and institutional actors;
- D. Many interviewees prioritize building power within their own communities and movement ecosystem;
- E. In the U.S. national context, interviewees see distinct narrative opportunity in affordability, anti-oligarchy sentiment, and the economy being broken; and
- F. Fragmentation at the language level, yet cohesion at the values level: Nearly half of interviewees believe the most important narrative shift to make is from individuality toward collective care.

In this report, we also share stories of narrative wins that interviewees are already achieving, along with practical lessons about what helps narratives resonate, from making abstract economic ideas tangible, to connecting messages with lived experience, values, and clear pathways to action.

Together, these findings and stories paint a picture of a movement ecosystem that is simultaneously fragmented in its language, sophisticated in its power-building instincts, and closer to mainstream breakthrough than it may realize—given rising national narratives around affordability and the economy being broken.

Finally, the report offers three recommendations for action aimed at helping the field build greater narrative coherence, capacity, and collective power:

- 1. Invest in and build narrative and solidarity infrastructure;
- 2. Act on the fact that aligning on economy has cross-movement significance; and
- 3. Experiment with bold language; the gains might be great.

What emerges from this research is that this movement is rich in solutions and narrative experimentation, but fragmented in language, navigating complex audience demands, and showing both a clear need and strong appetite for greater collective narrative alignment.

BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

There are decades of proven models and practices that advance inclusive economies and address economic injustice. Despite the transformative power and impressive track record of these solutions, many of these efforts remain invisible—left out of media coverage, political debates, and broader cultural narratives.

This report is part of a project that aims to explore this gap. Called *Margins to Mainstream*, this narrative research and action project includes three components:

- **Narrative research** with and for inclusive economies movement leaders to identify strategic possibilities for greater narrative power;
- A **demonstration campaign** that turns findings into action through learning by doing; and
- Strategic **dissemination of our learnings**, with movement peers and funder allies, in accessible and actionable formats.

The vision for the Margins to Mainstream project began through a participatory grantmaking process by the Surdna Foundation and the Center for Cultural Innovation. Grantees of the Surdna Foundation's Inclusive Economies program were invited to design and steward a special grant opportunity that would boost the inclusive economies field. The grantees landed on a focus of narrative learning and experimentation. Four leaders within Surdna's grantee community stepped up to form a Stewardship Council, to refine the vision that became the Margins to Mainstream request for proposals, and steward the grant application and selection process.

At the same time, our three organizations—Beloved Economies, BLIS Collective, and Imperative 21—were already in conversations about pursuing a similar goal with a collaborative approach. We jointly applied for the Margins to Mainstream grant and were honored to be se-

lected to collaboratively implement its vision. We have continued to be in conversation with the Stewardship Council members throughout the process to build on their initial thinking. When we learned that the Wellbeing Economy Alliance was also pursuing a related effort, we explored ways to exchange learnings, and two of their team members helped with our interviewee identification and research interviews.

This report is the result of the first phase of the Margins to Mainstream project—initial learning with over 70 leaders in the field to explore which narratives are helping inclusive economies work move forward, which ones are holding it back, and what kinds of alignment or capacity gaps exist across the ecosystem.

This report is *not* a narrative design document or roadmap for *how to* break through to the mainstream. Neither is it an exhaustive survey of the narrative work that people in our field have done to date. **Rather, it is a collective self-assessment effort that we hope serves to hold up a mirror to our efforts, to see narrative power-building efforts and opportunities across our movement(s) more clearly.**

In particular, we hope it helps us see ourselves not merely as individual organizations, but as part of an interconnected ecosystem advancing liberatory and healing economic transformation—an ecosystem whose ideas, we argue, are on the cusp of mainstream breakthrough. Our aim in this initial research has been to identify strategic opportunities for leaning into narrative alignment and power-building together as a movement ecosystem.

Finally, in reaching out to over 70 strategically selected leaders of economic justice and transformation work across the U.S., our aim was not only to gather insights from interviewees. We also wanted to form a stakeholder community to whom the Margins to Mainstream effort could be accountable. We asked every interviewee for their advice on how we can make our work most useful in subsequent steps and how they might want to continue to engage. It is our highest aim to generate deliverables that are high-value and immediately actionable for this community of incredible leaders, and the larger movement ecosystem they reflect.

We hope this initial report serves to inform and inspire upcoming action together.

OUR APPROACH

Our overall approach is rooted in a commitment to narrative action that is innovative for our field, while strongly reflecting movement leaders' insights and priorities. Our central research questions for this initial step were:

What narratives are currently shaping the inclusive economies space?

What effect do they have on different audiences?

Are there opportunities to align and amplify narratives that can drive transformative change?

To explore these questions, we employed two methodologies: qualitative **interviews** with movement leaders, and **textual analysis** of the language that these leaders' organizations use to describe their work.

Our first step was determining who we would reach out to in the inclusive economies field for these conversations and textual analysis, and why.

To create selection criteria, our three organizations decided to first define what we mean by inclusive economies—a phrase we used in this project because of its origins with the Surdna Foundation's Inclusive Economies program. We posited that working toward inclusive economies means centering the following lenses and aims:

- A. A prosperity and inclusion lens → to sustain and nourish all people;
- B. An ecological lens → to regenerate our planetary ecosystems;
- C. A reparative and justice lens → to seek to repair past and present economic injustices; and
- D. A systems overhaul lens → to actively dismantle extractive systems and challenge dominant power structures.

To be included as an interviewee, groups needed to meet the following criteria:

1. Advancing economic justice and transformation is a primary aim/focus of the organization;
2. The organization is advancing solutions/activities that embody at least three of the four lenses/aims described above; and
3. The organization is leading meaningful narrative work visibly and consistently. We consider meaningful narrative work to be a diverse set of approaches rooted in a commitment to multifaceted, collaborative/networked, and insight-informed strategy. For some groups, this may show up as having explicit narrative strategies and programs in their organization; for other groups, this shows up in the form of *telling the story of their work in a way that has strong potential for generating broader narrative change*.

Geographically, the Margins to Mainstream project is focused on the U.S., so groups included would necessarily be focused on U.S. work. The vast majority of the groups we reached out to are U.S.-based; however, we also included several organizations working with a global or regional focus whose work includes addressing U.S. issues and audiences. We sought geographic diversity within the U.S. in terms of where groups are working and/or headquartered.

Finally, we also sought to include a diversity of types of entities and actors engaged in advancing inclusive economies:

- **Organizations advancing inclusive economy solutions** for the communities they serve and/or seek to influence, including advocacy organizations, services organizations, think tanks, applied research and educational organizations, and more;
- **Movement infrastructure organizations** focused on supporting entities within our movement(s) to boost their reach and resilience, including through fiscal sponsorship, capacity-building services, technical assistance, financial services, narrative and communications support, and more;
- **Capital holder funders**, including philanthropic foundations, individual donor and/or investor networks, and impact investing funds; and
- **Intermediary & community-stewarded funders**, including grant-making entities that raise the capital they deploy, and investment or integrated capital entities such as community-owned asset vehicles and frontline impact funds.

We decided to apply the above selection criteria and parameters in a two-phased approach via a *snowball* methodology—a technique in which each participant recommends others from their networks, expanding the sample organically.

As with any snowball sample, this approach carries limitations—notably, the risk of over-representing networks already connected to our three organizations and potentially under-representing leaders working outside established inclusive economies infrastructure, including in more rural or less institutionalized contexts.

A note on demographic diversity of interviewees

We sought to interview leaders who reflect the diversity of the inclusive economies movement. Our initial outreach list was shaped with input from the Stewardship Council and our own organizational teams, who together are connected across a wide range of organizations and leaders in the inclusive economies space. Together, we identified and outreached to a starting sample that reflected multiple forms of diversity. As we then applied the snowball methodology, the recommendations interviewees shared for additional participants dramatically expanded the range of leaders included, the kinds of organizations they lead, and the communities they serve.

Aiming for a total sample size of approximately 80, we started with an initial group of 36 participants for phase 1 interviews. Those individuals shared a wealth of recommendations for additional interviewees. We applied our criteria to that set of recommendations to select an additional 38 interviewees, for a total sample size of 74 interviewees.



To learn about the multiple forms of diversity reflected by our interviewees and the organizations they represent, see [APPENDIX A: A SLICE OF OUR MOVEMENT\(S\): WHO WE ENGAGED](#).

The interviews were conducted by team members of Beloved Economies and Imperative 21, with support from team members of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance who conducted 11 of the first 36 interviews.



For the list of individuals interviewed and the organizations they represent, see [APPENDIX B: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES THAT INFORMED THIS REPORT](#).

The textual analysis was conducted by the BLIS Collective, with a focus on the “About” pages of over 50 organizational websites represented by our interviewees, as well as review of additional communications materials that interviewees shared. Insights from that analysis are integrated into this report.



You can also see the full textual analysis report in [APPENDIX C: FULL TEXTUAL ANALYSIS REPORT BY BLIS COLLECTIVE](#).

KEY FINDINGS

The 74 interviews and our analysis of interviewees' organizational language yielded far more than this report can fully capture. However, we have included links throughout this report to the (anonymized) data sets that we worked with, for interested readers who want to dig deeper.

Here, we pull out six striking findings that emerged from our analysis of the data. We share the notable trends in the data, along with our reflections on opportunities we believe these trends reveal for greater narrative alignment and power across our movement(s).

A. Interviewees use many different terms to name the economy they are working toward

Interviewees are tackling the transformation of our economy in wide-ranging and multifaceted ways. Their solutions span running guaranteed income pilots; incubating worker-owned cooperatives; mobilizing financing for community-serving birth centers; facilitating the rematriation of ancestral Indigenous lands; offering alternative MBA curriculum; scaling shared ownership of companies, residential communities, and local shopping centers; and so much more.

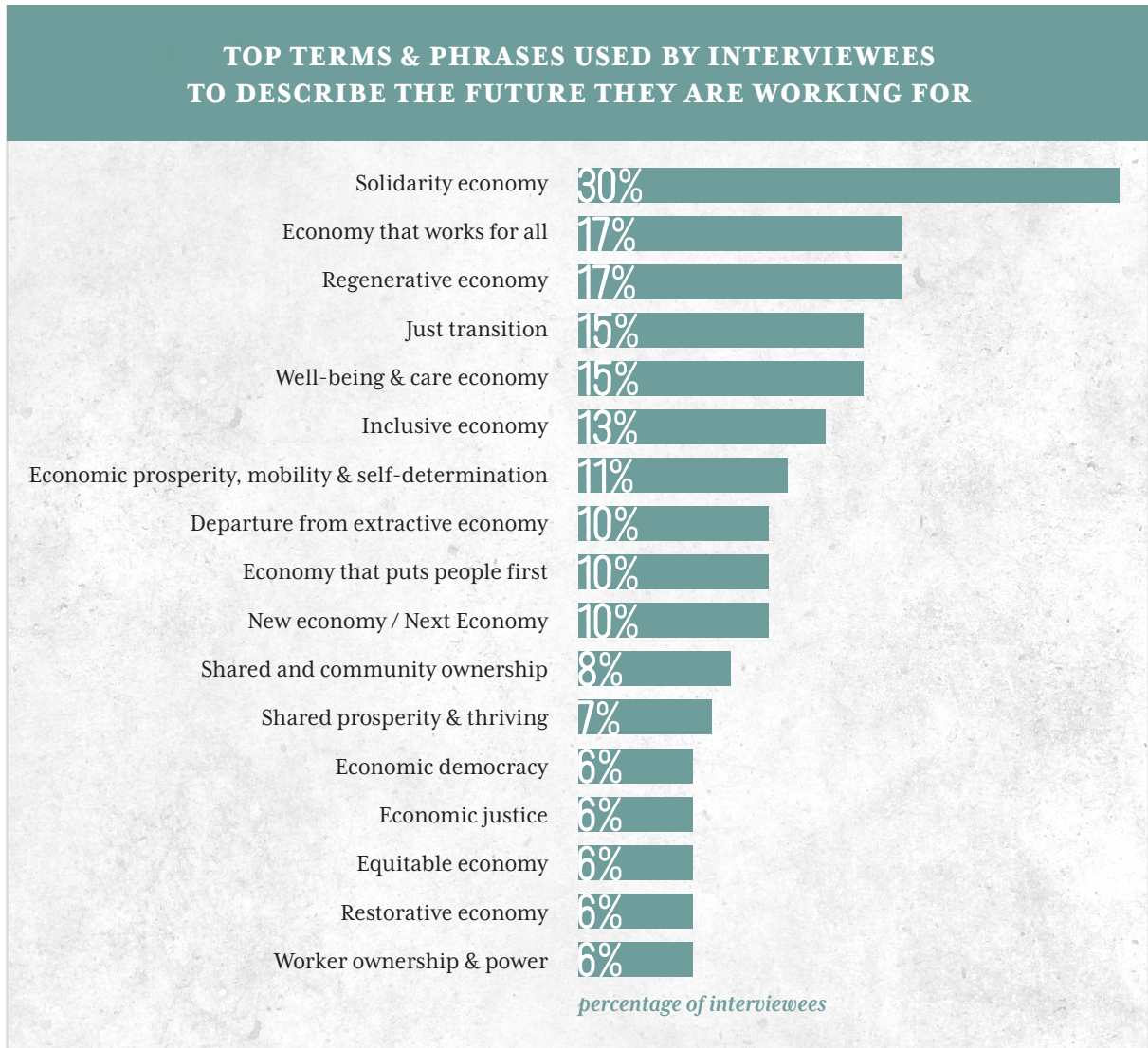


To see a fuller list of issue areas and solutions that interviewees' work encompasses, see [TAB 1 OF THE DATA SET](#).

We asked interviewees about how they described their work beyond the level of their particular tactics and day-to-day activities; specifically, we asked them: *What language and terms do you use when describing the economy and the future you're pushing for?*

Interviewees' responses show they use many different terms. Collectively, **interviewees named 47 different terms and phrases**, and single interviewees often named multiple terms they use within a single organization: 49 percent of interviewees stick to mostly using one to two terms; another 34 percent use three to four. A small number, 19 percent, use five or more terms.

What are the most common terms that interviewees use? The table below shows the terms and phrases *that were referenced by at least four interviewees* in describing the future they are working toward.



There were 30 additional terms or phrases that interviewees named, the vast majority of which were noted by only one or two interviewees.



To see the full list of categories of terms mentioned, see [TAB 2 OF THE DATA SET](#).

When looking at the frequency of term use, the most commonly noted is *solidarity economy*—mentioned by twice as many interviewees as the next most popular terms. At the same time, many interviewees also noted that the phrase *solidarity economy* is one that didn't resonate with mainstream audiences outside of movement contexts. In fact, three of the top five most mentioned terms—*solidarity economy*, *regenerative economy*, and *Just Transition*—are terms that numerous interviewees noted as being inaccessible to those outside the movement and attributed to their work staying in echo chambers.

Interviewee **Richard Wallace of Equity and Transformation (EAT)**, an organization building social and economic equity for Black Chicagoans engaged in the informal economy, including post-incarcerated and unhoused people, reflected:

“We need to use language derived from the communities we serve, as opposed to the academic institutions we graduate from, to describe these projects. We don't use 'solidarity economy' day to day—people were like, 'Brother, what are you talking about?' Much of what we regard as solidarity economics is derived from the lived experience of low-income people. My entire family time-banked and practiced solidarity economy in our daily lives, but we never used those terms to define it.”

Echoing this sentiment, interviewee **Brittany Koteles of Land Justice Futures**, which supports religious landowners to create new land transitions that are ecologically and racially healing, pointed out:

“There's a prefigurative academic tone to a lot of how we talk about this, and I think we have a purist impulse that keeps any kind of 'normie' language at arm's length. If we're going to go to the forefront, we can't choose isolating language.”

The other two referenced phrases in the top five—*an economy that works for all*, and *a well-being and/or care economy*—were not flagged by any interviewees as inaccessible to those outside the movement. Yet, the data shows they are not highly used terms among our interviewees. Despite being among the top three referenced phrases, they only account for 16 and 15 percent, respectively, of those noted by interviewees.

It's also notable that, of the 47 terms or phrases shared, almost 30 percent of them are terms mentioned by a single interviewee each.



To see the full list of categories of terms mentioned, see [TAB 2 OF THE DATA SET](#).

This data raises the question as to whether fragmented language across the movement is contributing to organizations' work being perceived as niche and disconnected from one another's efforts.

B. Interviewees’ communications materials reflect six key patterns that show more narrative coherence than their terminology suggests

In the textual analysis of communications materials that interviewees shared and the “About” pages of their organizational websites, we identified six different narrative themes in how groups position their work and frame solutions. Some organizations use more than one theme. The table below explains the six themes and the percentage of use by interviewee organizations:

NARRATIVE THEMES IN HOW INTERVIEWEES’ ORGANIZATIONS DESCRIBE THEIR WORK ONLINE	
Community Empowerment & Power-Building (64%)	<i>Building, mobilizing, and redistributing power to communities that have historically been excluded from economic and political decision-making. Emphasizing “people power and people’s institutions” with a commitment to sustainable, inter-generational, and community-controlled infrastructure rather than dependency on external actors.</i>
Collaboration & Interdependence (58%)	<i>Weaving collaboration, solidarity, and interconnection across diverse stakeholders working toward shared goals. Emphasizing broad-based coalitions. Framing economic transformation as necessarily collective rather than individualistic.</i>
Movement & Strategies for Systemically Oppressed Communities & Groups (49%)	<i>Explicitly naming and centering those most impacted by economic injustice, with particular attention to racial and class marginalization. Positioning these communities not as beneficiaries but as architects of economic alternatives.</i>
Systemic Change from the “Extractive Economy” (36%)	<i>Explicitly names and challenges the existing economic order while articulating alternatives rooted in regeneration and redistribution. Often explicitly identifies antagonists. Signals a complete reimagining rather than modification of existing structures.</i>
Universal Benefits (32%)	<i>Articulates economic justice as an opportunity to create systems and conditions that benefit all life. Paints a vision of shared abundance while building broad coalitions.</i>
Innovative Practices & Strategies (25%)	<i>Positions organizations as pioneering and experimental in their approach to economic transformation. Emphasis on the creation of new knowledge and practices that break from conventional models.</i>



To read the fuller results of the textual analysis, see [APPENDIX C](#).

C. Most interviewees feel pressure to code-switch, adapting their language for funders, mainstream audiences, and institutional actors

Interviewees are working to engage a wide range of people in sparking change for economic justice and transformation. In sharing about the audiences they prioritize reaching, they collectively paint a picture of the impressive breadth and variety of people being engaged by our movement(s).

Interviewees describe their audiences ranging from *legacy residents of Black and Brown neighborhoods; middle-class professionals; the 1 percent; queer Native community; formerly incarcerated system-impacted people; people who are leaders in their communities; faith-oriented investors; economists; small business owners; large tech companies; co-op leaders; people who are building care infrastructure in their communities; and so much more.*



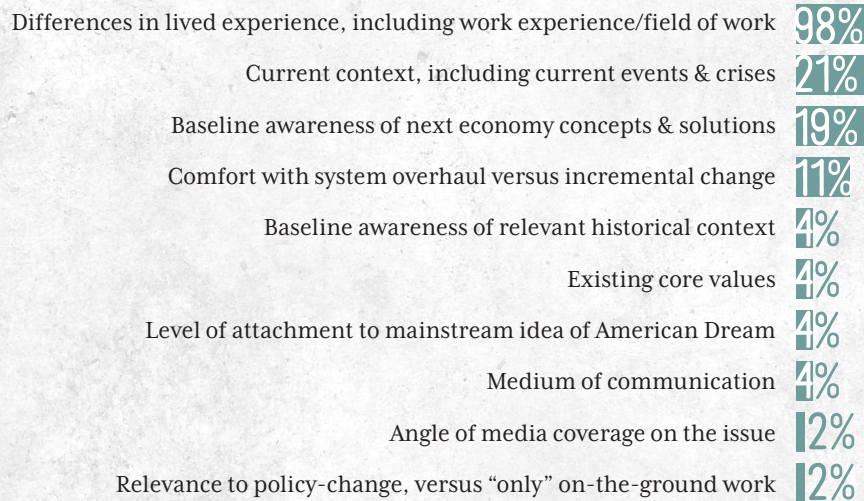
To see the full list of audiences mentioned by interviewees, see [TAB 3 OF THE DATA SET](#).

When asked about the most important audiences they need to engage to do their work, most interviewees named more than one audience. They shared an average number of three audiences. Only 21 percent of interviewees said they focus on a single audience or audience type. The majority—61 percent—name two, three, or four primary audiences. And 10 percent of interviewees name five or more primary audiences.

Notably, when interviewees were asked whether they feel their messaging lands differently with the various audiences they engage, 100 percent of the respondents said yes. When asked why they believe this is the case, almost all of the respondents (98%) pointed to a difference in people's lived experiences. They also pointed to other reasons why the same messaging can land very differently:

In naming their priority audiences, interviewees mentioned an average of three—with 10 percent naming five or more.

REASON WHY MESSAGING LANDS DIFFERENTLY



percentage of interviewees

Almost all of the above categories relate to what many interviewees refer to as “audience readiness” for their messages.

Notably, in speaking to how they navigate these differences in audience readiness—as well as in speaking generally to the question of messages landing differently with different audiences—over half of the interviewees (51%) used the term *code-switching*. And more interviewees, while not explicitly mentioning the term, shared about ways they are essentially constantly code-switching in how they modify their messaging across different audiences.

Importantly, the data suggests that this code-switching may not be primarily about trying to be more palatable for businesses-oriented or other mainstream audiences, or to prevent ruffling feathers. It may, most often, be closely tied to securing funding and organizational sustainability. In other words, **it's hard to speak out against the current economic system while also asking for money from the current economic system.**

Specifically, half of all interviewees (49%) named funders as a priority audience. In fact, the only audience named more frequently (and just slightly more frequently, at 50% of interviewees) was movement organizations, activists and leaders. This means that funders, investors and wealth-holders of various types are a major audience to which interviewees and their organizations are speaking.

Importantly, this audience category does not just reflect interviewees talking to their own funders. **It also significantly reflects strategic advocacy and organizing that interviewees are doing with philanthropic and investment actors to move capital toward meeting and re-sourcing movement solutions.**

The textual analysis also points to this audience potentially playing a significant role in driving code-switching. In assessing which words appear most frequently across organizations' "About" pages online, one of the words most frequently used—by an order of magnitude above most other words—is *impact*. Arguably, this is a word that is driven by investor/capital relationships in which groups seeking capital have to prove their “return on investment,” more than coming organically from constituent communities and movement organizations.



To read the fuller results of the textual analysis, see [APPENDIX C](#).

Regardless of the reason or the audience, catering messaging to meet audiences where they are is not necessarily a problem. It can be highly effective. But with the high number of audiences that interviewees are engaging and the degree of code-switching most seem to be juggling, the data suggests that these leaders and their organizations are investing a tremendous amount of energy in tailoring their messaging. We will return to this topic in the Recommendations section of this report, in exploring possible alternative ways our movement(s) may be ready to invest some of this energy.

D. Many interviewees prioritize building power within their own communities and movement ecosystem

To explore trends in the audiences that interviewees prioritize reaching and engaging with, we grouped the specific audiences they named into twelve broader categories of audiences, shown in the table below.



To see the full list of audiences mentioned by interviewees, see [TAB 3 OF THE DATA SET](#).

Each of the twelve audience categories is shown below, along with the percentage of interviewees that mentioned engaging audiences in that category:

PRIORITIZED AUDIENCES



Three of the top four mentioned audiences categories—*Movement organizations, activists, and leaders* (50%); *Members of an identity-based or lived-experience-based community* (36%); and *Residents of a place-based community* (31%)—are audiences that are part of interviewees’ own communities and movement ecosystems (as opposed to external actors they are trying to shift, such as policymakers or corporate leaders). **This reflects that many interviewees see narrative building work that is internal to our movement(s) as a strategic priority.**

We asked interviewees about the goals they have for all their audiences—what they hope audiences will do as a result of their organizations engaging them. Interviewees shared a wide range of very specific change objectives they have for their audiences, with over 60 different objectives noted.



You can see the full list of goals interviewees mentioned, in [TAB 4 OF THE DATA SET](#).

We grouped these specific objectives into just over a dozen broader categories of audience engagement goals. Each of these thirteen categories is listed in the table below, along with the percentage of interviewees who mentioned audience objectives within that category:

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT GOALS



percentage of interviewees

The largest category is *Organize & empower to take action*—a category focused on power-building with and for audiences that are part of interviewees’ communities, coalitions, and movement ecosystems. Additional categories reflect goals for these same audiences, including: *Strengthen movement infrastructure & interconnection*; *Build community power & ownership*; and *Build capacity of movement leaders*.

The textual analysis also reflects this focus, given the most common theme in interviewees’ communications materials is *Community Empowerment & Power-Building*, used in 64 percent of the materials analyzed.

As a whole, the data reflects that interviewees do not approach strengthening their own communities, organizations and coalitions as an afterthought nor as something secondary to advocacy goals with conventional power-holders. To the contrary, it is a priority for their work in economic transformation and justice.

We believe this is a highly strategic prioritization, and we will return to this topic in the Recommendations.

E. In the U.S. national context, interviewees see distinct narrative opportunity in affordability, anti-oligarchy sentiment, and the economy being broken

In reflecting on the national context narratively, interviewees pointed to a number of narratives rising in prominence that they believe could be helpful for boosting the traction of our movement. The narratives named by most interviewees are summarized in the table below:



To see the full list of narratives interviewees mentioned as ones achieving prominence that may be helpful to their efforts, see [TAB 8 OF THE DATA SET](#).

The top three most frequently cited rising narratives are those related to: a crisis of affordability; anti-billionaire, anti-oligarchy, tax the rich / spread the wealth; and the economy being exploitative and broken. Each of these was named by almost a third of the interviewees who answered this question (28% each).

Interviewees noted that the rising prominence of these narratives reflects increasingly common lived experiences of these economic failures. For example, on the topic of affordability On the topic of affordability, interviewee **Tenesha Duncan, of Orchid Capital Collective**—a firm leveraging grants, loans, and investments to fund the shift toward community owned and driven comprehensive birth and reproductive care—pointed out,

“Affordability is hitting everyone. It’s not just people who receive or are eligible for Medicaid or SNAP benefits. . . . Healthcare affordability and the investment premiums and things like that are hitting everyone.”

Interviewees' responses suggest that they see the strongest narrative momentum around critique of the existing economy—naming economic pain, unfairness, and system failure. However, the next two frequently cited narratives, at 13 percent each, were solution oriented: One of these is employee ownership and other forms of shared ownership as a winning strategy. In other words, interviewees note the rising prominence of narratives emphasizing how alternative ownership models can benefit workers, communities, and businesses alike—whether through employee ownership of companies, community ownership of land and real estate, or community-owned infrastructure.

On this topic, interviewee **Esteban Kelly of the U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives**, a national grassroots membership organization for worker cooperatives and democratic workplaces, reflected on the significant narrative opportunity around shared ownership models, particularly in reframing them from niche or countercultural alternatives into practical pathways for economic participation and stability:

“Worker co-ops were seen as a way to exit or opt out of the economy. And now they’re one of the only ways that people can actually access the economy . . . for precarious workers, gig workers, freelancers, immigrant workers, Black workers, creatives, artists. . . . Worker ownership is one of the only ways that you can formalize this thing, that you can get a paycheck for doing those things.”

The second of these top solution-oriented narratives was the topic of universal basic income (UBI). In naming this narrative, interviewees also noted that mainstream messaging about UBI tends to be problematic in ignoring structural injustice and historical roots of economic inequality in the U.S. (as opposed to guaranteed income, which focuses specifically on people and communities most impacted by economic exclusion and extraction). Some interviewees nonetheless feel that the rising prominence of UBI-related narratives may still be helpful in sparking broader questioning of the economic status quo and demand for alternatives:

Interviewee **Adriana Abizadeh-Barbour of Kensington Corridor Trust**—an organization revitalizing the Kensington Avenue business corridor of Philadelphia through a new model that increases neighborhood control and shared ownership—highlighted the opportunity in wide-ranging impacts emerging from existing UBI pilots:

“There are really positive and beautiful outcomes coming out of UBI pilots, showing what we’ve always known to be possible when people are resourced, around household stabilization, employment, family reunification, and physical and mental health. So UBI, I think, is one [such narrative].”

Interviewee **Arthur Woods, of Work in Progress**, a collaborative initiative designing an intentional evolution of work, noted the bipartisan nature of the interest in UBI:

“All of the work around UBI is increasingly bubbling up right now because of the injection of AI, the potential displacement of jobs and decreased capacity at work. For many, what felt like a far-fetched idea years ago, is now starting to make a lot of sense—on both sides of the aisle—and be seen as a necessary development to counteract unintended consequences of new technology..”


For all of the above rising narratives, interviewees often noted that such narratives are starting to break through at levels previously unprecedented in their careers. Collectively, they point to a narrative landscape that, despite its significant perils at this time, is also ripe with opportunity for sparking mainstream discussion of, and demand for, economic justice and transformation. The implications of these national narrative trends are a topic we will return to in the Recommendations.

F. Fragmentation at the language level, yet cohesion at the values level: Nearly half of interviewees believe the most important narrative shift is from individuality toward collective care

We asked interviewees, if you could spark one narrative shift in the next five years, what would it be? Some knew their answer immediately; others thought deeply; many struggled to pick just one.

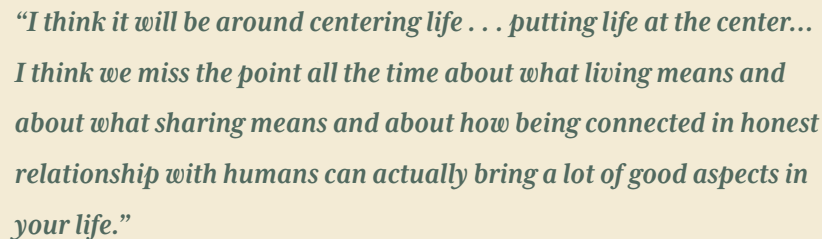
Their responses reflect a high degree of alignment in the fundamental narrative shifts they want. Further, one of the most striking data points of this entire study is that nearly half of respondents (40%) named the same fundamental shift: moving away from individuality toward collective care and understanding of interconnected well-being.

Three interviewees summed up this shift—either in their interviews or their communications materials—with the saying, “We all do better when we all do better.”



Further, one of the most striking data points of this entire study is that nearly half of respondents (40%) named the same fundamental shift: moving away from individuality toward collective care and understanding of interconnected well-being.

And many interviewees spoke to the nuances of this shift. For example, **Belén Marco, of New Economy Coalition**, a coalition of over 170 organizations building the solidarity economy in the U.S., noted how this shift could be linked to centering life, instead of centering capital:



“I think it will be around centering life . . . putting life at the center... I think we miss the point all the time about what living means and about what sharing means and about how being connected in honest relationship with humans can actually bring a lot of good aspects in your life.”

Sterling Johnson, of the Partnership for Southern Equity during the time of his interview, an organization advancing policies and institutional actions that promote racial equity and shared prosperity in Atlanta and the American South, and currently of the Arthur Blank Family Foundation, noted how this shift could underpin how we think about shared ownership:

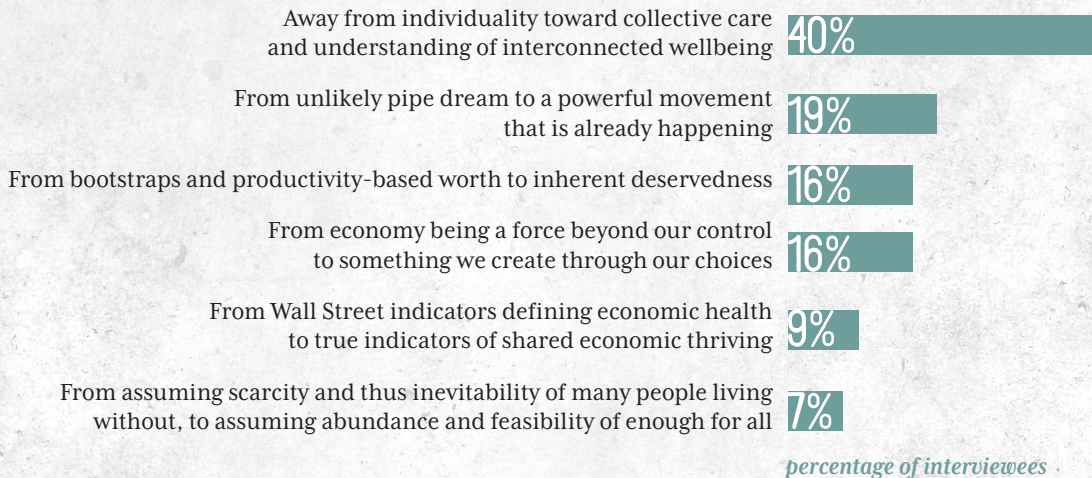
“A lot of the narrative about power [is] tied to ownership when it’s not about individual ownership at all, it’s about communal ownership and communal power. . . . The oppression we experience comes from private ownership and from the extraction of our economic value.”

Elyse Dempsey of Roanhorse Consulting, an Indigenous-led firm that works to change power dynamics in health and wealth systems, highlighted how this ethos of profound interconnection is not something that her organization highlights as anything “new.” Instead, they emphasized that it is about affirming a long-standing way of being and operating:

“The way that we exist as Indigenous people is being in harmony with human and non-human relatives, and... we have always had economies that have sustained us—pre-colonialism and pre-settler-ism. So the way that we introduce ourselves, and the way that we work, is calling in where we come from as Indigenous people and the histories that we can stand on, because they have existed before and will continue to exist.”

While no other shift was named at nearly such a high rate, there were five other shifts that a significant percentage of interviewees picked.

TOP DESIRED NARRATIVE SHIFT TO ACHIEVE IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS



The second most frequently mentioned shift centered on moving away from inclusive economies solutions as fringe and unrealistic, to already happening and growing in momentum. As interviewee **Lyneir Richardson of Chicago Trend Corporation**, a social enterprise catalyzing strategic commercial development that strengthens urban neighborhoods, summed it up,

“I don’t think enough people believe that it can be financially self-sustaining, profitable, but also impactful at scale. . . . People are talking about all the cool projects . . . this cool thing in Asheville, this cool thing in Buffalo. . . . But the thing about place-based work is then people think it never scales. The narrative change I want is: you can do systemic change, you can do inclusive economic development and growth. It can be financially rewarding and it can scale.”

Similarly, **Lucas Grindley of Next City**, a nonprofit journalism organization that aims to make cities more equitable and inclusive, argued that movements must actively surface and amplify examples of transformation already happening in practice:

“There is a false narrative that things can’t be changed or that systems are too big and you just have to work within them and do your best. We say that change is not only possible—change is happening, and we make it our job to go find it. . . . Progress is not lost, it’s local.”

While less frequently mentioned than the other top six in the table above, the narrative shift toward deservedness was still a top pick and described powerfully by many interviewees. As summed up by interviewee **Charissa Laisy of Common Future**, an organization advancing thought leadership and resources for an equitable economy,

“There is a narrative around a shared humanity and being deserving of what you need to live a good life, regardless of the choices that you’ve made, regardless of where you grew up.”

Speaking to the type of deservedness narrative shift that she believes is most important, interviewee **Aisha Nyandoro of Springboard to Opportunities**, a Jackson, Mississippi based non-profit pioneering a radically resident-driven approach to ending generational poverty, noted:

“Not the narratives of deservedness that are the mainstream . . . but it is the narrative of deservedness that is about abundance, joy, radical possibilities, radical imagination.”

Regardless of how many interviewees mentioned a shift, each shift that interviewees named is powerful and visionary.



We encourage you to check out the full list of shifts named in [TAB 9 OF THE DATA SET](#).

In considering with *whom* they hoped to spark such shifts, interviewees also showed alignment. The primary audiences they engage every day are numerous and varied, but when asked about the one or two audiences that our movement(s) need to prioritize reaching more effectively to advance our work out of niche spaces and toward greater mainstream traction, interviewees coalesced around a relatively short list. The table below shows the top mentioned audiences:

Their responses collectively point to a large population deeply impacted by economic injustice and precarity—likely receptive to our movement’s solutions, yet not currently aware of or engaged by it.

MOST STRATEGIC AUDIENCE(S) TO REACH FOR OUR MOVEMENT(S) TO ACHIEVE GREATER TRACTION	PERCENTAGE OF INTERVIEWEES
Policy makers & public officials	22%
Funders and investors—individuals, families	17%
Workers	17%
Funders and investors—institutional	15%
“Values-aligned people not yet aware of or activated on how their values could be embodied by the economy,” including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audiences that our movement is mistakenly assuming are “not ready” for our messaging—people that should be brought into a bigger shared “we” • Movement-adjacent folks who “are right there in principle,” and experiencing precarity like anxiety about pensions or job security, but are not yet equipped or mobilized • Disenchanted or disengaged voters who lean right or have drifted away from the left, but who are actually aligned with progressive economic policy in practice 	13%
Young people	11%
Artists and culture makers	9%
People of color	9%



For a full list of audiences identified by interviewees, see [TAB 12 OF THE DATA SET](#).

The top two specific audiences named were policymakers/public officials and individual or family funders/investors, reflecting an emphasis on influencing traditional targets of advocacy efforts, decision-makers, and resource holders. However, looking across the full list of audiences mentioned, a significant pattern emerged: Participants repeatedly pointed toward groups of people who are experiencing economic anxiety, instability, or exclusion but who are not connected to unions, movement spaces, or other political homes related to economic justice and transformation. **Their responses collectively point to a large population deeply impacted by economic injustice and precarity—likely receptive to our movement’s solutions, yet not currently aware of or engaged by it.**

Together, interviewees’ thinking around the foundational narrative shifts we need to spark and the priority target audiences for achieving greater traction and influence show important convergence. What may seem like disparate efforts across our movement(s) actually share powerful common ground.

WHAT'S WORKING IN ACHIEVING NARRATIVE WINS

Despite both the lack of alignment in terminology interviewees use to describe the futures they are working toward and the code-switching they juggle, they are achieving resounding narrative wins.

When we asked interviewees for examples of a time their messaging powerfully resonated with and moved audiences, interviewees shared an average of three concrete examples of such narrative wins, even though the question was framed as asking for just one. Every respondent met this question with enthusiasm to share examples of their storytelling successes and the winning strategies they believed were behind them.

The wins that interviewees shared range from sparking existential questioning among institutional investors as to what financial return they should seek on investments and why; enabling recent immigrants to realize they can launch their own cooperative business in ways that draw on cherished traditions from their home country; empowering the staff of birth centers to pursue and secure alternative financing that keeps their doors open and supports their staff and clients to thrive; inspiring retiring Baby Boomers of the “silver tsunami” to transition their family businesses to worker-owned cooperatives; and so much more.

The examples interviewees shared show instances in which their storytelling was moving audiences deeply. Their audiences are moved to tears, to new understandings, and to action—whether through giving generously, supporting new policies, launching or transforming their own businesses, and more. These wins are sparking among audiences what interviewee Unai Montes-Irueste, formerly of People’s Action, refers to as the *heart-head-hand arc*—moving people at the emotional level (heart); then grounding that emotion in data-backed, often economic evidence (head); and presenting compelling and feasible action they can take (hand).

We share five examples, below, to provide a window into the kinds of wins and strategies that interviewees shared.

WINNING STRATEGY: TAKING PEOPLE THROUGH AN EXPERIENCE TO SPARK NARRATIVE SHIFT

Jeremie Greer, of the national movement support organization [LIBERATION IN A GENERATION](#), shared *experiential* approaches to narrative change that the organization has found to be particularly powerful. One example is the “policy design circles” that Liberation in a Generation runs with community members, in which they use artifacts to spark experiential narrative shifts with participants.

Jeremie described a policy design circle that his team ran related to guaranteed income. In each circle, they handed each participant an official-looking envelope containing a guaranteed income check. Participants knew it was a simulation but nonetheless had emotional reactions opening the envelope and holding the fictional check—some even cried. The power, noted Jeremie, is the felt experience of receiving this kind of support, rather than just hearing about it abstractly.

“We’re not telling a story. We’re taking people through an experience.” He emphasized that experiencing something firsthand creates deeper, stickier narrative change than watching a video or reading about it.

Liberation in a Generation leverages this approach on a range of issues related to transforming our economic realities—from inviting participants to open an envelope with a guaranteed income check inside, to inviting them to use an app to browse (simulated) social housing listings of beautiful and truly affordable housing in their city, to receiving a debt-free college acceptance package folder from “Baldwin University.” In referring to the Baldwin University letter, Jeremie noted that opening it evoked immediate, visceral reactions—“oh my God”—because it made possible futures tangible and real.



WINNING STRATEGY: CENTERING A PHRASE THAT INSPIRES BIPARTISAN SUPPORT

Bria Bennett of [OHIO ORGANIZING COLLABORATIVE](#) described the resounding success her organization and allies achieved through centering the phrase the workforce behind the workforce in their campaign to advance just and affordable childcare for all Ohioans.

Bria explained that prior to their campaign, the childcare crisis in Ohio was a hidden, back-burner issue. The crisis encompassed both a lack of accessible and quality childcare options for many Ohioans, and woefully inadequate pay and support for childcare workers.

“People just don’t understand that I can go to work because I can drop my kid off at 6:00 a.m. and then I’ll pick them up at 7:00 p.m. when I’m done with work,” explained Bria, “which means that, at our childcare centers, staff there are up at 4:00 a.m. and they’re going to bed at 9:00 p.m. while also having their own family responsibilities.” These multifaceted economic justice issues related to childcare in Ohio were issues that most people simply did not see or think about.

The Ohio Organizing Collaborative’s work with the Care Economy Organizing Project dramatically changed that—and their narrative at the center of the campaign was key. “We came out and said that we’re fighting for the workforce behind the workforce, when we’re talking about childcare.” That messaging decision has resulted in major wins.

At the policy level, the phrase helped advance two bipartisan bills offering free childcare for childcare workers. The proposed bills gained support early on from unlikely allies, including the Ohio Chamber of Commerce and Ohio Right to Life. The bills are currently on track to pass and create a program called the Workforce Investment Now Childcare Pilot.



Credit: CEO Project

The messaging also galvanized and inspired everyday Ohioans across the political spectrum. For childcare workers, the phrase frames the problem as a social issue: they deserve affordable childcare for their own children. For business leaders and Republican policymakers, the phrase reinforces the economic issue: one childcare worker opens five additional childcare spots, getting more families back to work and boosting the economy.

The phrase also spread rapidly, gaining national coverage in outlets like 19th News and Salon. It also spawned op-eds, white papers, surveys, and research, which Bria and team hope will continue to advance solutions to the childcare crisis across Ohio and beyond.

Bria noted that the phrase’s power came from its simplicity and ability to bridge economic and social justice frames simultaneously.

WINNING STRATEGY: CONNECTING ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION TO BELOVED FAITH TRADITIONS

Darakshan Raja, of the movement-building organization [MUSLIMS FOR JUST FUTURES](#), reflected on her organization's success in attracting new allies and supporters by highlighting specific Islamic traditions that have long guided Muslim communities in stewarding wealth toward collective care and shared thriving.

For example, she described *Zakat*—Islamic giving for communities, estimated at over \$1 trillion annually from Muslim communities; *Sadaqa*—voluntary charitable giving used to build community institutions like mosques, community centers, and educational institutions; and *Waqfs*—endowments in which people dedicate land or resources for specific purposes (like education) over centuries—foundational models that later inspired Western endowments.

Darakshan and her team emphasized that post-9/11 financial regulations have criminalized and targeted Muslim giving mechanisms in ways that have prevented community capital deployment and gutted community infrastructure.

Muslims for Just Futures has been able to mobilize new support for their efforts to combat this injustice and advance solutions through highlighting these traditional Islamic practices in ways that allow audiences outside the Muslim community to see the connection with cherished practices from their own faith traditions. Darakshan recalled one instance in which a donor was shocked to realize she had never encountered these strong traditions—and was deeply moved by how similar they are to teachings in her own religious tradition. She subsequently arranged for a major grant to Muslims for Just Futures to support broader movement infrastructure.

Even for people not deeply connected to a faith community, Darakshan noted that elevating these Islamic financing principles tends to be powerful because of how strongly they align with solidarity economy principles.

Through messaging that foregrounds these religious teachings, Darakshan awakened in new audiences a sense of commonality with principles they already hold dear. These audiences then become much more willing to see themselves as allies and take action in support of Muslims for Just Futures' work.

continued >>



Similarly, Elizabeth Garlow of [CHARISM CAPITAL](#), a new impact-first fund of funds anchored by Catholic Women Religious, spoke to ways that highlighting the values and practices of Catholic Sisters in stewarding and sharing their financial resources has been effective in emboldening a wide range of investors to make choices that depart from business-as-usual investment logic—whether professional investors within institutions, or everyday people managing retirement savings and household finances.

As one example, Elizabeth noted, “When Sisters share their journey of getting to an ethic of enoughness, that seems to really land with people.” In fact, she found that the idea is often revelatory for audiences: “They are recognizing, ‘Oh my gosh, I can be so liberated when I just focus on enoughness, rather than accumulating as much as I possibly can in every area of my life.’”

It has also proven widely resonant to simply name the kind of investing that the Sisters are doing as faith-first investing. “We say that we are actually going to be taking faithful risks in the name of an economy that supports the flourishing of life,” explained Elizabeth. As she and her colleagues have leaned more strongly into such language, she found that more and more people were hungry for the opportunity to be in spaces where they can talk more explicitly about the faith dimension of their work and choices—or of what they hope to do differently.



Regardless of the faith tradition, messaging that explicitly foregrounds faith-based principles aligned with an economy of care and shared thriving can create a welcoming space for people exploring alternative economy ideas for the first time.

WINNING STRATEGY: CHALLENGING AND REPLACING EXISTING TERMINOLOGY

Jen Astone of [COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR JUST FINANCE](#) described their network’s effort to retire the investment term “concessionary returns” altogether because of how it assumes that prioritizing people is something to apologize for. Instead, Jen and colleagues pointed out that we should call lower-rate investment returns what they are: *non-extractive*, *restorative*, or simply, *fair*.

The problem, Jen emphasized, is that use of the term *concessionary* shut down conversations and possibilities. It also artificially limits funding—when foundations label something “concessionary,” it tended to restrict access to only 5 percent of their investment capital instead of 100 percent.

To challenge this status quo, Jen and her co-director Kelley Buhles created a flier and associated organizing effort to shift language away from *concessionary* toward *restorative capital*. They landed on the term *restorative* through a feedback-gathering and a co-creative process with their organization’s community, including members of their [TRANSFORMATIVE 25](#) list of alternative funds. The adoption of “restorative returns” reflected a shared desire to honor the work of Nwamaka Agbo on [RESTORATIVE ECONOMICS](#) and name the need to actively advance healing and restoration for the communities that have been most impacted by the extractive economy.

The flier they developed is a simple, scannable two-pager with talking points on how to interrupt investors’ use of the term and redirect conversations. It’s not a heavy report—just four key points that people can digest in a couple minutes.

Critically, rather than positioning it as “Collective Action for Just Finance’s findings,” Jen and her team actively encouraged all the funds in their Transformative 25 fund community to fan out and use this language collectively—making it feel like a sector-wide shift, not one organization’s mandate.

Since launching the two-pager and effort last year, people were already responding positively. Jen heard from staff at a major foundation that they were removing “concessionary” from their website, and many groups have reached out to request the two-pager for investor conversations.

As momentum and use of the two-pager grew, Jen’s goal is to influence major conferences like SOCAP to adopt this language shift, and help newer staff at foundations understand why this terminology shift is key to having more productive conversations with alternative finance practitioners. The traction they’ve already achieved suggests that collectively aligning on even a single well-chosen term can spark wider shifts in norms and practices across a sector.



WINNING STRATEGY: FOCUSING ON NARRATIVE SHIFT WITHIN ONE'S COMMUNITY

Aisha Nyandoro of Mississippi-based [SPRINGBOARD TO OPPORTUNITIES](#) highlighted how the organization's narrative focus on the families and community they directly serve—rather than on external, more mainstream audiences—was critical to the power of their work. The organization's “radically resident-driven” approach to ending generational poverty is reflected not only in the solutions they advance and the methods they employ together with community members, but also in where they put their energy narratively.

Aisha was clear that their organization's primary audience was the moms and families in their community who they work with directly, including through their acclaimed guaranteed income program [MAGNOLIA MOTHERS TRUST](#). Their goal is to support these moms and families in shifting their own narratives around deservedness and their inherent right to joy, a good life, and to be able to dream.

“Whenever I think about the work that we are pushing for, it is that everyone understands that they are deserving of dreams for themselves,” reflects Aisha. “My responsibility is to gather my people—making sure that they understand that deservedness is something that we all should be leaning to, that joy is a birthright.”

Aisha was explicit that she was no longer trying to persuade mainstream audiences. Instead, when she does engage with broader audiences (like writing for Forbes or having op-eds placed by mothers in their community), it's simply to inform, not to shift values or perspectives. She recognized that changing people's deeply held values and consciousness requires enormous time and energy that she'd rather invest in her own community.



“I have done a cost-benefit analysis of where our energy needs to be put. And I can't put energy in changing your values because that's not just a one-time thing; that is a constant.” Reflecting on decades of leadership in racial and economic justice, Aisha believes that, as a movement, we have told ourselves a lie about where change comes from—that focusing on the mainstream is necessary.

Instead, Aisha and her organization have demonstrated the far-reaching impact of narrative work focused on nourishing the power of one's own community and their dreams, trusting that change will ripple out from there.

Across the many narrative wins that interviewees shared, they pointed to important lessons in what made these succeed. **The top referenced winning strategy by far (named by 50% of respondents) was: Use personal stories and create a personal connection.**



To see a shorthand list of winning strategies that interviewees mentioned in relation to their wins, see [TAB 6 OF THE DATA SET.](#)

Given that interviewees are pulling off these wins with limited funding, pressure to code-switch, and scarce alignment in terminology, imagine what would be possible with greater resourcing to be aligned and working in greater coordination on what works?

There is tremendous power in the stories that interviewees are telling about the solutions they advance. We will explore possibilities for channeling this power in the final section of this report.

WHAT'S NOT WORKING

Lastly, interviewees were also clear about what did not work, in reflecting on instances when their storytelling fell flat with intended audiences. The top two reasons for narrative failure that interviewees pointed to, by a large margin, were that *the language used was too technical, jargony, or unclear* (41%) and that *the message was not adapted for the audience's readiness* (37%).

The fact that interviewees named these points as the top two reasons for narrative failure suggested that interviewees saw such failure as fundamentally a messaging misalignment problem, rather than an issue of their solutions inherently not being of interest to audiences.



To see a shorthand list of reasons for narrative failure highlighted by interviewees, see [TAB 7 OF THE DATA SET](#).

Interviewees saw such failure as fundamentally a messaging misalignment problem, rather than an issue of their solutions inherently not being of interest to audiences.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

In reflecting on potential implications of this research—both for our upcoming action steps for the Margins to Mainstream narrative initiative, and for our field more broadly—we engaged with the data as not only co-researchers and co-authors, but also as fellow practitioners and movement leaders for economic justice and transformation.

With this lens, we identified three primary recommendations—for all of us who care about moving economic justice and transformation from the margins to the mainstream.

1. Invest in and build narrative infrastructure

We believe that there is an investment mandate in interviewees' responses to the question: "Are there narratives or movements that you feel could align more effectively to strengthen the movement for economic justice and transformation of the economy?" Rather than focusing their responses on specific movements or narratives, **80 percent of respondents instead brought up a need to identify and organize around shared, bridging language across our movement(s).**

Relatedly, the next most common answer to this question, named by 33 percent of respondents, was a call for large-scale collaboration, or solidarity, infrastructure—shared funding, resources, and alignment that allows individual organizations and campaigns to be more effective.

Unai Montes-Irueste, formerly of People's Action, which builds the power of poor and working people in urban, rural, and suburban areas to win change through issue fights and elections, mentioned that movements need shared spaces, overlapping participation, and repeated collaboration in order to build “critical narrative mass” and shared language across ecosystems:

”

“If I say ‘democracy,’ and one partner group thinks I’m talking about elections, and another thinks I’m talking about an abstract ideal, when I mean both shared power and the equitable distribution of resources, then how are we going to build critical narrative mass? It’s not about being scripted and parroting each other. It’s about cultivating overlapping definitions. Massive collaboration is the baseline. How can any effort to cultivate shared language bear fruit if we’re alone? Cross pollination is not possible in silos.”

Several participants pointed not simply to the need for stronger narratives, but for connective infrastructure capable of bridging currently siloed movement ecosystems. For example, **Michael Mezzatesta of Better Future Media**, which works across written and video media formats to advance understanding of systems change for ecological and human wellbeing, described the continued separation between labor, climate, and economic systems change spaces as a major strategic gap:

“I’m still waiting for the labor movement to merge with the climate movement and the economic systems change movements. . . . It’s such an integral part of it, but it still feels like it’s sitting over here as its own thing.”

Nia Liggins of Civic Commons, an organization bringing people together across sectors to build greater racial and economic equity in Washington state, compared movement coordination to a marriage between people with distinct but sufficiently aligned frameworks:

“There has to be enough similarities and parallels in those frameworks for the marriage to work. . . . If our frameworks aren’t close enough, it’s going to be hard for us to find shared ground in order to work together.”

Interviewees were clear: this kind of narrative alignment doesn't just happen by itself. Solidarity infrastructure creates the capacity for actors across movements, networks, and ecosystems to collaborate on a deeper level.

Interviewees also mentioned specific opportunities for greater strategic narrative alignment across efforts, demographics, and regions.



See the full list of narrative alignment opportunities named in [TAB 10 OF THE DATA SET](#).

Interviewees' keen interest in strengthening narrative infrastructure for our movement(s) also came up outside of the official interview conversations. As interviewers and interviewees chatted about next steps at the end of the calls, several interviewees asked about opportunities to learn from and with fellow interviewees, whether virtually or in person. Every single interviewee expressed enthusiasm about this effort and asked us to please keep them posted on ways they can plug in, learn, and even support.

We are humbled that leaders of this caliber—with so much on their plates—are eager to engage. And we believe their interest signals something far larger than this particular effort. The response shows the high degree of awareness among movement leaders of the pressing need to invest in building our collective power to tell transformative stories. Interviewees speak to the need to do so at the movement level, allowing us to learn and build beyond the container of our individual organizations or campaigns.

We recommend that our movement ecosystem, including our funder allies, take bold steps toward investing in solidarity and narrative infrastructure for and with our movement(s) so that such support is abundant and accessible.

2. Act on the fact that aligning on economy has cross-movement significance


Economic justice and transformation is a powerful cross-movement catalyst. Its inherent connection to so many other progressive issues was clear in what interviewees shared about the other movements they associate with and feel part of—ranging from racial justice movements, to the abolition movement, to Indigenous Land Back and repatriation, reproductive and birth justice, immigrant rights and inclusion, and more. Approximately 60 percent of interviewees mentioned three or four movements they feel a part of.



To see the list of other movements that interviewees work within and feel part of, see [TAB 11 OF THE DATA SET](#).

The interconnectedness of the economy is of tremendous importance—especially now. **Our success in transforming the economy matters for progressive issues and movements broadly.** In these times of rightward shifting political landscapes in the U.S. and beyond, political strategists are seeing more openings for progressive, transformative economic ideas and solutions to unite the left and splinter the right. There is an opportunity for progressive efforts to drive that conversation and own the agenda. As such, economic transformation ideas are a key

point of narrative intervention that movements for multiracial democracy, shared thriving, and collective care can leverage with great success—because, unlike the right, we have real solutions, including many that our movement ecosystems have been advancing for years.



We want to lift up the cross-movement victories that could be unlocked by bringing economic justice and transformation into the mainstream—through the powerful solutions and histories from our movement.

3. Experiment with bold language; the gains might be great

When we look at the powerful narrative wins that interviewees are achieving, and the economy-related narratives that are now rising in prominence nationally, we see a movement ecosystem on the cusp of breakthrough.

We believe that as relevant national narratives rise in prominence—such as those related to the affordability crisis and shared ownership as a win-win—along with the crises and lived experiences driving them, mainstream audiences’ readiness for our movement’s messages and stories is increasing alongside the need for our solutions. Given this, we feel movement leaders may be overestimating the need to code-switch. In fact, continually code-switching may be undermining our movement’s power.

One example came to our attention through the textual analysis led by the BLIS Collective of the organizations’ online language. Within the most prevalent narrative theme—Community Empowerment & Power-Building—the analysis identified two subthemes in how interviewees’ materials framed their community power-building work: the first was power-building as *redistribution* of wealth and resources that are already accessible, and the second was power-building as the *accumulation* or *growth* of wealth and ownership among those traditionally excluded from it.

Black and Indigenous knowledge systems teach us that we already have the resources needed to sustain thriving communities. The challenges currently facing our communities are not

issues of scarcity, but rather centuries of violent dispossession and ongoing extraction. Framing power-building conceptually as redistribution upholds concepts of stewardship and reciprocity while redefining wealth as collective well-being. This shift from *accumulation* to *redistribution* also challenges the growth-dependent logic of capitalism itself.

If our movement's power lies not in building more wealth, but rather in removing systemic barriers and redistributing existing resources in accordance with principles of truth-telling, relationality, redress, and care, then our language needs to match. What if more of us leaned into the language of redistribution and collective well-being associated with that power?

What if we embolden our language to evoke reclamation, repair, and reimagining without code-switching? Might there be gains there—the potential of which is not yet fully realized?

Finally, in relation to the narratives that interviewees see rising nationally—such as related to affordability and shared ownership, while they pointed to singular experiments to test these frames (e.g., affordability in Zohran Mamdani's mayoral campaign; specific efforts in the worker ownership field), there was no mention of anything close to a movement-wide experiment to harness and build upon such rising narratives.

It's hard for single organizations to test bold new language alone—and doing so can also create risks that some organizations may be less able to shoulder. We recommend that we invest deeply in conducting strategic experiments with emboldened language at the level of multi-organization, cross-regional, movement-spanning action. These experiments could explore strategic opportunities that movement actors align on, such as specific rising mainstream narratives that many groups want to try connecting to, or specific target audiences that groups jointly see as strategic.

For the organizations involved, and for the movement ecosystems and marginalized communities connected to their work, the gains could be significant.

* * *

What we surfaced through this collaborative process and in our findings suggests the moment of mainstream breakthrough is closer than we think, and the movement already has what it needs to meet it.

We are grateful to the over 70 movement leaders who shared so generously of their insights, expertise, and encouragement in our interviews.

We look forward to continuing to share and build together in the steps ahead.

Beloved Economies

Beloved Economies is an economic innovation firm dedicated to activating the powerful lever of *transforming how we work* to build an economy that works for all.

BELOVEDECONOMIES.ORG

BLIS Collective

BLIS (Black Liberation-Indigenous Sovereignty) is a cross-movement Solidarity & Action Hub braiding narratives and growing movements to win policy and shift culture.

BLISCOLLECTIVE.ORG

Imperative 21

Imperative 21 is a global network shaping economic narratives and reimagining systems so that everyone, everywhere can thrive.

IMPERATIVE21.CO

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IMPERATIVE 21