

Grand Narrative

Story Transition Worksheet

Leaders often need to relate a “New Story” to their existing understanding in order to take it forward. A “Grand Narrative” is one way to provide a frame large enough to include both the Past/Current and the New Stories. You can use your Grand Narrative to guide your communication strategy, or as the basis for conversations with key leaders and stakeholders.



Step 1: Analyzing The Stories

Stories are about meaning, which generally falls into three categories: What’s Important or worth pursuing, The “Facts” about how things work, and What We Need To Do (or how we should act). See how your Past/Current and New Story differ around each of these messages – and what new breakthroughs, insights or data triggered the change.

	Past/Current Story		What’s Changed: Breakthroughs, New Data		New Story	
Key Messages	Example	Your Outline	Example	Your Outline	Example	Your Outline
<u>What’s Important</u> <i>What is worth pursuing, what we want or care about</i>	We wanted basic city services for security & health				Our citizens now want a thriving community with a real sense of place	
<u>The “Facts”</u> <i>Our understanding of current reality, our environment, how our world works, human nature, etc.</i>	Offering basic services required creating a city government -- but we were worried that would to bureaucracy and unnecessary spending		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Population has grown New residents have different needs & desires City Budget Deficits are deepening every year 		Other cities have raised sales tax rates Some residents are leaving, causing retailers to leave	
<u>What We Need To Do</u> <i>Actions, models, processes, roles, initiatives, etc. that allow us to pursue what’s important, given the “facts”.</i>	We agreed to incorporate as a city, but we promised NEVER TO INCREASE TAXES beyond what’s needed for basic services				We need to raise sales tax rates to provide the sort of community our residents want	

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Step 2: Your Grand Narrative

Your “Grand Narrative” weaves together the old story and the new, so people can make sense of what is changing and why. You create your Grand Narrative by pulling together elements of the Past/Current Story, What Changed, and the New Story, using a common narrative structure*. Walking through it this way allows you to engage key leaders and stakeholders in Discussion Questions around the evolution of the story.

Section	Example	Your Outline	Supporting Material/ Examples	Discussion Questions
<p>The Situation: <i>Readily recognizable summary of the Current Story and why it made sense.</i></p>	<p>Given how the city was founded, it was logical to limit tax increases</p>			<p><i>Do we have this right? What is important not to lose?</i></p>
<p>The Complication: <i>The Breakthroughs, Insights, or New Data that complicated the situation and require us to respond.</i></p>	<p>But our population has grown and new residents want something different Besides, our budget deficits continue to deepen every year despite significant cost-cutting</p>			<p><i>Are you aware of these? Any questions about them? What are you seeing that might also be relevant?</i></p>
<p>Central Question or Issue: <i>How our story needs to involve in response to this Complication, while meeting the needs of the Situation.</i></p>	<p>How can we evolve as a city to become the vibrant place our citizens want, while being fiscally sound?</p>			
<p>The Answer: The New Story <i>An overview of the New Story and how it answers the Central Question. Be prepared with supporting detail.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raising taxes to match regional levels, will allow us to create a sense of community and place – thereby attracting & retaining residents & retailers 			<p><i>Does the story make sense? What opportunities does it bring to mind? What doesn't make sense yes? Why? What do you see that others might be missing?</i></p>
<p>Implications <i>What this means for the listener, including what to expect, requests for input or action, etc.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would you be willing to lend your support for a modest tax increase? 			<p><i>What energizes you? Where do you see yourself in this, ideally?</i></p>

*Adapted and simplified, based on “The Minto Pyramid Principle: Logic in Writing, Thinking, and Problem-Solving”, Barbara Minto, 2003