*A New Narrative for the
New England Food System*

NARRATIVE TOOLKIT
Food Solutions New England

Contents

What is the purpose of this toolkit?

This toolkit is designed to help Food Solutions New England and its partners and allies communicate consistently about their shared vision to advance a more just and equitable food system in New England. Our hope is to provide organizations with compelling language to communicate complex ideas about the food system to a variety of audiences across the region, along with tools and templates to identify and assess your audiences and to tell strategic stories to motivate them to support your work.

How should I use the toolkit?

The language in this toolkit can be used as a reference or template for preparing materials and presentations. Drawing upon the language and best practices in this toolkit will help you deliver a consistent and motivating message that will enhance understanding of your work and amplify your collective impact.

Science tells us that people are most likely to support a cause or change their opinions about an issue when presented with a coherent narrative that frames the topic with an intuitive set of themes, utilizes familiar language, and appeals to commonly held aspirations and values. Accordingly, this manual presents aspirational narrative elements about people in New England and a vision for an ideal food system, built through an iterative process of crafting and testing messages about key themes.

The narrative elements and supporting content use clear, memorable language to establish a set of common ideas about the New England food system. Common ideas and language provide alignment, clarity, and consistency to ensure potential partners and stakeholders can see themselves in the work—and build momentum behind a movement for a more just and equitable food system.

For maximum effectiveness, the language and ideas in this toolkit should be tailored for different audiences, areas, and occasions. The narrative elements are not intended as a universal, exclusive message about the New England food system. Rather, they are a resource from which messengers can draw material and inspiration as they craft communications.
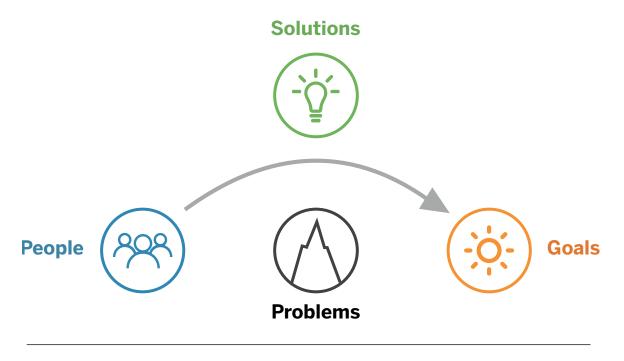
The interactive tools can help you craft messages and stories that will motivate key audiences to support your work. If you aren't sure where to begin, consider starting with the Audience Assessment Tool (page 25), followed by the One-Minute Message template (page 24), and finally the Social Impact Story Map (page 26). This will help you develop everything you'll need to start consistently communicating key ideas from the narrative elements to your audiences.

The Narrative Structure

Strategic communication means using communications to achieve specific outcomes. Every communication must have a clear purpose and a clearly defined audience, whether it's a single sound bite, a post on social media, or a fully integrated campaign. Once you determine the purpose and audience, you can use the resources in this toolkit to explore how best to motivate the target audience—and to create words, images, and experiences that will get results.

People interpret and express their experiences through narratives. These narratives provide frameworks that help people create meaning and make judgments about the world. To understand people's internal narratives and craft new ones for them, we use a simple but powerful tool from literature, the Narrative Structure.

Solutions

People

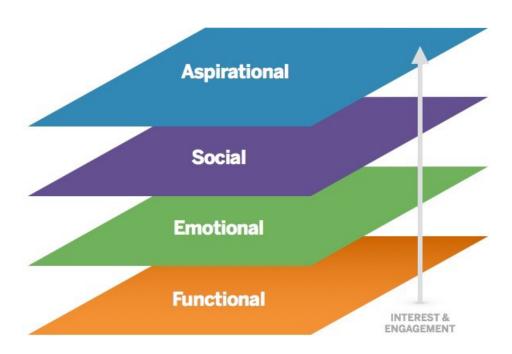**Problems**

Goals

Call to Action

The Aspirational Communication Model

People are motivated by a variety of factors—including their hopes, values, emotional reactions, social influences, and intellectual interests. Market researchers often refer to these as audience "drivers," because they drive attitudes and behavior. To explore drivers of behavior and create communications that resonate with people, we employ the Aspirational Communication Model.

The model suggests that you achieve greater interest and engagement by connecting with people on multiple levels: appealing to their hopes and values **(aspirational)**, putting people in the picture **(social)**, speaking to both the heart and the head **(emotional)**, and offering benefits that people understand and value **(functional)**.

- How does your work connect to your audiences' aspirations for their lives?

- What compelling, personal stories can you tell to put a human face on your work?

- What emotional connections do people have to food, the food system, and the people who constitute it?

- What does your organization do to improve people's lives in your local community and beyond?

Aspirational

Social

Emotional

Functional

INTEREST & ENGAGEMENT

Winning Words

Ultimately, the words and images you use determine whether your communications are effective, or fall flat. You must take great care in finding words, phrases, images, and metaphors with maximum motivating power and word-of-mouth potential.

We suggest using a list of standards to find the "Winning Words" that are memorable and motivating. These standards are based on cognitive research suggesting that the most powerful language will create emotional reactions, be both credible and easy to understand, and evoke visual images in the mind. You also want the message to spread on the Internet and via word-of-mouth, so you must use words that people will retain and want to repeat.

For the language to have maximum power, the audience must:

FEEL IT
Does it create an emotional reaction? Emotion plays a key role in attention, retention and motivation.

BELIEVE IT
Is it familiar and easy to understand? Familiar catchphrases, everyday words and simple sentences aid fluency.

SEE IT
Does it create visual images in the mind? Vivid language helps people picture people, places and things.

SAY IT
Will people retain and want to repeat it? Both clever and common phrases have word-of-mouth potential.

ASPIRATIONAL NARRATIVE ELEMENTS

The Aspirational Narrative Elements on the following pages are based on research conducted with numerous audiences. Given the complexity of the food system and the diversity of your network, each narrative section (e.g., People, Goals) contains a number of discrete Narrative Elements. Each element contains key ideas and concepts that you want people in New England to understand about the food system, communicated using memorable, motivating language.

Below, we've included the Narrative Elements themselves, explained the motivating power behind key words and phrases—called Winning Words—included in the Narrative Elements, and highlighted language that our research suggests you either avoid or consider carefully before including in your communications. We've also included tips for communicating about people, goals, problems, solutions, and calls to action, as well as visual tips to help you use images effectively in your communications.

People

NARRATIVE ELEMENTS

People in New England working hard to feed themselves, their families, and their communities healthy food.

Workers producing, distributing, and preparing food for the whole region.

Activists, community leaders, researchers, and policymakers who use technical expertise and traditional knowledge to address complex food problems in the region.

WINNING WORDS

WINNING WORDS	WHY THEY WORK	LANGUAGE TO CONSIDER BEFORE USING
Working hard	Across geographies, social groups, and political divides, audiences in America respond very positively to the notion of hard work, and are more likely to support people they see as hard working.	Words and phrases that describe you or the people your work serves in negative terms, or that highlight their perceived shortcomings. Called "deficit framing," this language saps the protagonists in your narrative of agency and dignity, and creates distance between them and your audiences, which can make your audiences less motivated to support your cause.
Healthy food	Every audience should understand the value of healthy food, and this language helps make the abstract concept of an ideal food system more tangible and concrete.	"Food" alone without any positive modifiers. Interviewees often repeated the importance of ensuring that values like sustainability, fair labor, and nutrition become embedded in how we think about food. Further, without modification audiences could imagine fast food or other unhealthy forms.
Producing, distributing, and preparing food	To help audiences understand complex systems, you need to describe actors and actions in detail. This is a succinct way to communicate the many people who work to put food on the table throughout New England.	"Food system" is jargon that many people don't readily understand. You can certainly use the phrase when communicating to more expert audiences, but you should consider defining or operationalizing it when communicating to non-expert audiences.
Technical expertise and traditional knowledge	Placing community and native knowledge on the same level as technical expertise—a phrase that evokes higher education and other potentially closed off sources of information—communicates that you value these types of knowledge. This can motivate non-expert audiences to support your work.	Over-reliance on outside experts to solve problems. Audiences can be skeptical of one-size-fits-all approaches, and communities can be skeptical of outsiders who don't understand the reality on the ground.
People in New England	This is the easiest way to refer to the people your work serves. When communicating to various audiences and groups, you should use more specific language (e.g., farmers, fishermen).	"New Englanders" is not a phrase that many people in New England use to describe themselves.

COMMUNICATIONS TIPS

Help the audience "see themselves" in the narrative. Sometimes the audience is the protagonist, sometimes it's another group of people. Either way, your objective is to help the audience like and relate to the people in the narrative. This activates the "liking" heuristic, which says people form positive judgments about those whom they have positive feelings about, and "social proof," which encourages people to support a cause because others are doing it.

Describe people using personal traits, hopes, and values—not demographics, which can create "social distance" between groups. Include people affected by the problem, and those who contribute to the solution. Avoid "othering" language that creates negative associations.

VISUAL TIPS

Use close-up photographs of people that create a connection with the eyes. Show people doing things that make them likable and relatable to the audience, such as laughing, touching, working, etc.

Goals

NARRATIVE ELEMENTS

Everyone in New England—regardless of income, race, location, gender, citizenship status, or physical ability—can enjoy healthy food from trusted sources.

Everyone can choose food based on their values, cultures, and preferences, not just price. These choices contribute to thriving communities that offer jobs, education, and opportunity for everyone to live and work with dignity.

A more fair, equitable, and sustainable food system makes people, the environment, and the economy healthier.

WINNING WORDS

WINNING WORDS	WHY THEY WORK	LANGUAGE TO CONSIDER BEFORE USING
Regardless of income	Many respondents to the survey intuitively understood that expense is a primary barrier to more people in New England eating healthy food.	Relying on other demographic categories, such as race or gender, to describe barriers to accessing healthy food in New England. Many people don't intuitively understand how these characteristics prevent people from eating healthy food, and need more explanation and education before they're convinced.
Enjoy healthy food	Having access to healthy food is a simple, straightforward, powerful idea that people readily understand and want for themselves, their families, and their communities.	Highlighting inequities in food access (e.g., people with wealth and privilege have more access than those who don't) when describing the goal of your work. Inequity is a challenge that your work is helping to overcome, but not something you have to call out in this part of the narrative.
Based on their values, cultures, and preferences	Authentic choice is important to audiences, and people respond positively to language like this that makes more authentic choice an explicit goal. Should you need to simplify further, try "choose the food they want" or similarly straightforward language.	Audiences outside of FSNE and its allies don't often understand how the concept of "democratic empowerment" relates to food access or the food system more broadly. However, people understand the idea of having a voice or using their voice to make change, so try to find ways to translate that concept into everyday language for audiences outside of your networks.
Fair and sustainable	These concepts are fairly familiar in public discourse, and people understand their relationship to food.	The abstract concept of the "food system" can work with audiences who are familiar with this idea, but for non-expert audiences you'll need to take the time to explain what the food system is and why it matters to them.
Make the economy healthier	Audiences responded very positively to this idea, likely because many people understand how healthy food from local sources supports local and regional communities, which is good for the region's economy.	Using more abstract concepts like "economic development" to describe your goals. Instead, try to show people what economic development really means and how their lives will improve in tangible ways.

COMMUNICATIONS TIPS

Inspire people with a vivid vision of a desired future. Psychological research shows that people are more motivated to work toward goals they can actually see in their mind's eye.

Articulate the audience's aspirations in connection with the topic, along with specific, vivid outcomes that people can see. Use "vivid" words—both action verbs and descriptions of people, places and things—that create images in the mind. Avoid "abstract" language that doesn't.

VISUAL TIPS

Show people who have achieved the goal, using images that make the desired future vivid and create positive emotional reactions.

Problems

NARRATIVE ELEMENTS

Healthy food is easy to get for some people, but expensive or far away for others. Many people with wealth and privilege can choose what they want to eat, while those who don't too often can't. Discrimination in education, employment, and housing prevents many minority and low-income people from accessing healthy food, and even from cultivating and enjoying gardens and farm-to-fork programs in their neighborhoods.

Too many of the farmers, fishermen, and people who process, distribute, and prepare the food we eat don't get the respect, support, or fair pay they deserve for their hard work. They're often invisible to the people who eat the food they produce, and some are even oppressed, mistreated, and underpaid in order to make cheap food cheap.

Corporate food companies from outside of our region consolidate their power, monopolize markets, and wield unfair influence over regional policies. They take money out of New England while they hide the ways they hurt their workers, the environment, and their consumers in our region.

Many people in New England who would benefit from a more just food system don't realize that, together, they have the power to create large scale change. They don't know what to do, don't know where their allies are, or lack the time, money, and energy they need to organize and advocate for change.

WINNING WORDS

WINNING WORDS	WHY THEY WORK	LANGUAGE TO CONSIDER BEFORE USING
Easy to get for some people, but expensive and far away for others	Almost all audiences surveyed intuitively understand that good, healthy food is often expensive and difficult for working class people to get. This is a concept that audiences will readily believe.	Discrimination preventing people from cultivating gardens, enjoying farm-to-fork programs, etc. Many audiences don't understand how discrimination affects food access beyond income inequality, so they find this kind of language confusing or unclear. When invoking this idea, offer surprising statistics to support your claims.
Don't get the respect they deserve	This idea resonated with surveyed audiences, who want respect and dignity themselves. To create more emotional impact with your audiences, tell stories that illustrate this reality, and get specific about who's affected beyond farmers and fishermen (e.g., migrant farm laborers, grocery store employees), and how.	Many audiences surveyed didn't believe that farmers and fishermen were "oppressed, mistreated, and underpaid," or hadn't seen evidence of that in their experience or communities. Again, use surprising statistics or stories to bring these ideas to life.
The power to create large scale change	Whenever possible, use aspirational language that gives power and agency to the protagonists in your narrative. This phrase emphasizes that people in New England have the power to effect change, they just need the right forums or arenas in which to do so. This also helps you set up clear solutions that solve this specific problem.	Many survey respondents found the idea of corporate food companies consolidating their power and monopolizing markets confusing or unclear. Most people understand how large corporations can dominate smaller companies and local organizations, but you will need to use specific examples and stories to convince audiences not familiar with these dynamics in New England.

COMMUNICATIONS TIPS

Make the problem instantly understandable—"fluency" theory says people are more likely to trust information and ideas that are easy to understand.

Describe the problem's consequences for individuals and society, in order to create an emotional connection to the cause and make it relevant to as many people as possible.

Use physical metaphors and surprising facts that open the audience's eyes to the problem in a meaningful way.

Avoid overly complex language and ideas that make the problem seem unsolvable and demotivate the audience.

VISUAL TIPS

Put people in the picture: Show who is causing the problem and/or being harmed by the problem.

Solutions

State-level and community-based programs and policies help low-income people, especially in minority communities, get the education, jobs, and housing they need to eat the healthy food they deserve. Companies and nonprofit organizations work side-by-side to make sure healthy food gets from the people who make it to the people who need it—all at a fair price for everyone.

Everyone in New England appreciates and values the community of people working together to catch, raise, grow, prepare, and share food across the region, and demands that these workers receive the money and support they deserve.

Policies and practices ensure that everyone in New England can eat more food that's produced in New England, and that no outside corporation has an unfair advantage in how food is produced, distributed, prepared, and sold in our region.

People and communities across New England use their diverse voices to demand justice for those affected by historical and current racism and other forms of discrimination in the food system.

WINNING WORDS

WINNING WORDS	WHY THEY WORK	LANGUAGE TO CONSIDER BEFORE USING
State-level and community-based programs	Combining the large-scale approach of state-level policies with approaches that are responsive to community needs can build trust among audiences who are wary of one-size-fits-all or top-down approaches.	Talking about "policies and practices" without getting specific confuses audiences, who want to know what exactly you are doing or proposing.
Help low-income people	Most survey respondents understand that healthy food can be expensive, and that lower-income people often have a harder time feeding themselves and their families. Showing how your solutions help these people can build more support for your work.	"Poor," "marginalized," or other deficit language, which can distance the people you're trying to support from the audiences you're recruiting to help out.
At a fair price for everyone	People value fairness and being rewarded for hard work, so understand that consumers shouldn't overpay for food, while workers should be adequately compensated for producing and providing it.	Many respondents found the language describing outside corporations having an unfair advantage confusing or unclear.
Appreciates and values the community of people working together	Survey respondents support this idea, though many already believe that this community of people working together receives support. You should build on this understanding to help illustrate the abstract concept of the food system, since you can connect workers in each part to one another.	"No one tolerates injustice or oppression anywhere in the food system." Many survey respondents found this language confusing or unclear because they didn't think anyone was currently tolerating injustice or oppression, or they didn't know that injustice or oppression existed in the food system currently.
Use their diverse voices to demand justice	This highlights the region's diversity and also highlights people's agency and power to effect change.	When describing people "affected by historical and current racism and other forms of discrimination in the food system," offer evidence and examples so people understand and believe these realities. Right now, many surveyed respondents found this language confusing or unclear.

COMMUNICATIONS TIPS

Help people understand the solution—and believe that change is possible. State a specific solution that flows intuitively from the problem statement. The mind seeks coherence, so it's critical to ensure the problem and solutions are clearly connected.

State tangible benefits to people and society, so that people can see and feel how lives would be improved.

When talking about a policy or program, begin with guiding principles before stating specific solutions. Use vivid language to describe benefits that people can visualize. Where applicable, describe people who are part of the solution, and what they are doing to make a difference.

VISUAL TIPS

Show people whose lives are improved by the solution, and show people who are making the solution possible—particularly people who reflect the audience.

Research shows that people will mimic behaviors they witness in others, so it can be helpful to show people taking specific actions that you seek to encourage in the audience, such as going online to learn more about the topic, making a donation to the campaign, etc.

Call to Action

NARRATIVE ELEMENTS

There are many ways to be involved in creating a healthy, just, and strong food system for all of New England, now and into the future.

Help create a food system that strengthens our local economy, provides healthy good food to all our people, and takes care of the land and sea so that future generations can do the same.

WINNING WORDS

WINNING WORDS	WHY THEY WORK	LANGUAGE TO CONSIDER BEFORE USING
Healthy, just, and strong	These simple words convey powerful concepts that many survey respondents support and agree with. This is also good language to include when describing your goal.	Words like "equity" on their own can be confusing or unclear to people who haven't thought about those concepts. Be sure to explain these words and connect them to ideas that people understand, like inequality, fairness, and justice.
Help create	Once audiences are aware of the need for change and care about the cause you are championing, they want to know how to help. This language helps people understand that they have a role to play, and have power to effect change.	Survey respondents found the "many ways to be involved" language confusing or unclear due to the lack of detail. When crafting your communications, get specific about what you want people to do to help.
Strengthens our local economy	Connecting food activism to economic development and local jobs is a great way to build support for your work among audiences who may not currently think much about the food system.	Instead of relying on abstract concepts like "food system," try to connect your work to people and communities so your audiences can understand how big ideas about food affect them.

COMMUNICATIONS TIPS

Create a sense of urgency to act in the moment by creating both a sense of possibility and raising the specter of loss. "Loss aversion" theory says that people are more motivated to avoid losing something they already have than to gain something new. Describe what might be lost if they don't take action, highlighting the negative consequences for people.

Tell people exactly what they can do, and make it easy to act in the moment.

Suggest how the audience will feel if they take action, using positive, emotional language.

VISUAL TIPS

Show people who represent the audience taking the desired action, which encourages people to follow suit.

One-Minute Messages

You can use the Aspirational Narrative Elements and Winning Words in the previous pages to craft your own messages about specific issues or ideas. Below, we've included some hypothetical examples of how you might do this, along with a blank template that you can use yourself. Bear in mind that your messages should be more detailed than ours, pointing to specific problems your communities or audiences face, and outlining real solutions that your work supports or advances.

Example 1: Housing and Food Deserts

Hard working people and families in New England.

Deserve to enjoy healthy food from sources they trust, no matter what they look like, where they live, or how much money they make.

Unfortunately, healthy food is easy to get for some people, but hard for others. This isn't just because healthy food is often expensive, but also because historical patterns of discrimination in education, employment, and housing mean many minority and low-income people have to live in neighborhoods without grocery stores or farmer's markets.

Housing voucher programs help low-income people, especially in minority communities, afford to live closer to good schools, well-paying jobs, and quality grocery stores. Community-based programs help them afford healthy food at farmers markets as well, so they can feed themselves and their families the healthy food they deserve.

Support your representatives in Congress fighting to expand the housing voucher program for people in your community.

Example 2: Advocating Policy Change

Activists and community leaders.

Fighting for a more fair, equitable, and sustainable food system, so everyone in New England has enough healthy food to eat.

They're up against corporate food companies from outside of our region, who've been steadily consolidating their power and monopolizing markets to crowd out competition from local farmers and fishermen. Because of their size, they can wield unfair influence over regional policies and political investments. As a result, they suck money out of New England and often mistreat their workers and harm the environment in our region.

Activists and community leaders are combining technical expertise and traditional knowledge to address these challenges. They're advancing state and local policies that will ensure that everyone in New England can eat more food that's produced, distributed, prepared, and sold in New England, supporting local and regional businesses while they do it.
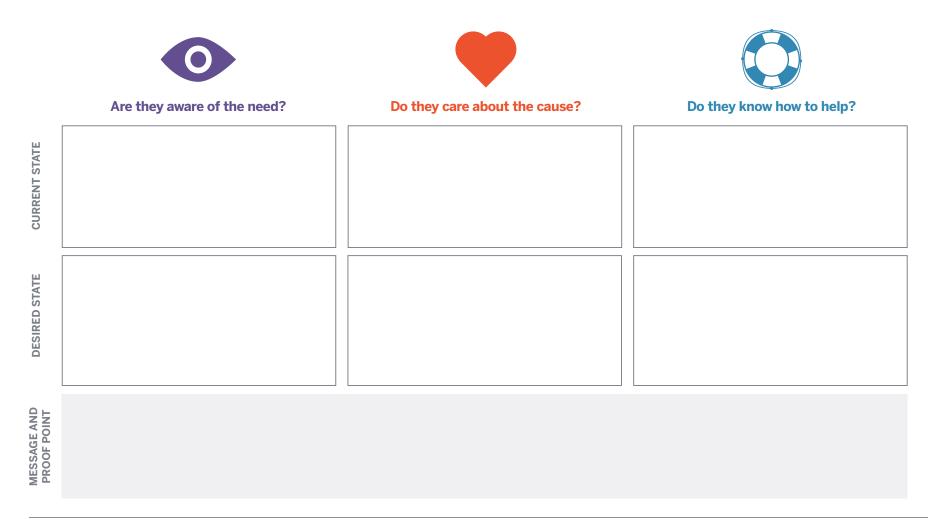
You can volunteer to help them build a regional food system that strengthens our economy, provides healthy good food to all our people, and takes care of the land and sea so that future generations can do the same.

Now use the space below to craft your own One-Minute Message to communicate key ideas about the food system and your work.

Audience Assessment Tool

For any of your communications to effectively motivate people to help you achieve a goal, you need to understand who your audiences are and what they need to know, feel, and do to help you achieve your goals. This means understanding their current awareness of the issue you're working on, their attitudes about it, and the actions they can take to support your work.

Use the worksheet below to assess one of your audiences, thinking about their current state across each of the dimensions below, as well as the desired state to which you want to move them. Then, brainstorm a short message, drawing from the Aspirational Narrative Elements and Winning Words on the previous pages, that can move them to your desired state. Finally, think of one or two proof points—surprising statistics or pieces of evidence that back up your claims—to support your message.

	Are they aware of the need?	**Do they care about the cause?**	**Do they know how to help?**
CURRENT STATE			
DESIRED STATE			
MESSAGE AND PROOF POINT			

The Social Impact Story Map: How to Craft Strategic Stories

Why Storytelling?

For thousands of years, storytelling has been one of humanity's primary forms of communication. From the first cave paintings to the latest Hollywood films, stories inspire and engage us. To advance your new narrative and communicate big ideas to key audiences, you will need to tell stories about your work and the food system. They help us make sense of the world, teach us important skills, and inform our sense of right and wrong. Processing information through stories holds several evolutionary advantages. Stories help us:

Understand cause-and-effect relationships.

Stories are shortcuts for our brains to understand cause-and-effect relationships. Understanding why "this causes that" is one of our most important cognitive functions—it helps us predict which actions will lead to which outcomes. It focuses our minds on the people affected by a problem, on what caused it, and on the people with the power to change it. Stories are one of the most effective ways to communicate about systems change because they put the focus on people and the tangible impact your work has on their lives.

See patterns in important information.

Our brains are constantly striving to recognize patterns that help us make sense of the information we're processing. The desire to figure out patterns is why we stay engaged in compelling stories—our brains want to know what's going to happen next. By triggering this impulse, stories keep us engaged and interested.

Empathize with people.

There's a reason we find ourselves crying during sad movies and on edge during horror films. Our brains have "mirror neurons" that mimic the emotions and experiences of people we observe. Because of this, stories give us the power to help our audience empathize with people, including with those who would benefit from the change we're trying to create. Creating that empathy is key to building support for our work.

Pay attention.

Stories hold people's attention far longer than mere data, and there's science behind that: Stories actually engage a much larger part of our brain. Different parts of our brain are responsible for processing sight, sounds, vivid imagery, emotions, etc. When we tell a story that stimulates our senses and our emotions, our brains fire on more cylinders—which means we're more likely to pay attention and remember what we're seeing and hearing.

These insights help explain why storytelling is one of the most effective forms of communication. By leveraging the way our brains process information, stories help motivate and mobilize audiences in a way that other forms of communication simply cannot. In the following pages, we'll share practical steps for crafting strategic stories about your work.

The Social Impact Story Map: How to Craft Strategic Stories

To help tell stories about advocacy and social change, we've created the Social Impact Story Map. The Story Map is adapted from the Hero's Journey, a tried-and-true model used to structure stories that capture people's attention and imagination. It is a "formula" based on research about storytelling across different cultures. It is also a flexible framework that works for telling many kinds of stories.

Familiarizing yourself with the Story Map will not only help you craft stories, but it will also help you identify stories by giving you clues about what elements you should be looking for.

The Story Map helps you structure your story around key steps that constitute a narrative arc.

There are four sections that are broken down further into 11 steps that you can use to map out your story from beginning to end. Some stories may cover all the steps, and some may touch on only a few—and that's okay.

In the pages that follow, you'll see guiding questions to help develop your own story outline.

IMPACT

· Lives are changed
· Lessons shared
· Call to action

STATUS QUO & FIRST STEPS

· Eyes opened
· Doubts arise
· Solutions emerge
· First steps

Social Impact Story Map

1 **2** **3** **4**

BREAKTHROUGH

· Action taken
· Breakthrough occurs

OBSTACLES & ALLIES

· Obstacles encountered
· Allies joined

Guiding Questions

Think of a story relating to your work that communicates one or more big ideas in the narrative elements. Use the following questions to help outline your story using the Social Impact Story Map. Not every story will follow all 11 steps, so don't get discouraged if you can't fill out each one.

Character & Setting

Who is the main character in your story?

Tip: The most effective stories are told from the perspective of an individual. Describe the person and the situation they find themselves in at the beginning of the story. This may be an individual leading the fight for change or a direct beneficiary of it.

Who are other characters in your story?

Tip: Compelling stories often include allies and partners who will join the cause. Describe individuals who play meaningful roles in the story.

Guiding Questions

Status Quo & First Steps

1 **Eyes Opened to Opportunities or Problems:** How were your main character's eyes opened to the need for change?

Tip: Recreate the moment when the character realized something needed to be done. This can help your audience experience the eye-opening moment for themselves. You could think of this moment as recognizing the problem or envisioning the solution.

2 **Doubts Arise:** What doubts or concerns did they have prior to taking action?

Tip: Using a surprising piece of information, articulate what is holding the character back.

3 **Solutions Emerge:** What idea, inspiration or event pointed toward a possible solution?

Tip: Use vivid language so people can visualize the solution you're talking about.

4 **First Steps:** What were the first steps taken by your main character? How did they align with the ultimate goal?

Guiding Questions

Obstacles & Allies

1 **Obstacles Encountered:** What challenges or obstacles did the characters encounter?

Tip: The obstacle should be meaningful but not overwhelming. Avoid complex language and ideas that can make the problem seem unclear and unsolvable and that can demotivate the audience.

2 **Allies Join:** What allies joined the work? What role did they play?

Tip: Talk about people involved in creating solutions to problems in their community as well as others who supported the cause. Including allies in your story can help potential partners envision how they might get involved.

Breakthrough

1 **Action Taken:** What other actions or steps were taken after the allies joined?

2 **Breakthrough Occurs:** What breakthrough occurred that helped the characters realize they could overcome the obstacle?

Tip: Explain how the breakthrough directly addresses the original problem.

Guiding Questions

Impact

1	**Lives are Changed:** How were people's lives affected?

Tip: Be specific about the tangible benefits for the people involved.

2	**Lessons Shared:** What lessons should be taken from the story?

Tip: Using a surprising piece of information, articulate what is holding the character back.

3	**Call to Action:** What actions can your audience take to help advance the cause?

Tip: Your story has inspired and informed people. Now, what can they do to advance the cause? Create a sense of urgency to act in the moment by pairing a sense of possibility with the specter of loss—what would happen if no action were taken? Tell people exactly what they can do, and make it easy for them to act by laying out next steps.

Common Storytelling Challenges

There are three types of social impact stories that people find difficult to craft:

1 stories when there is no impact (yet),

2 stories about systems change,

3 stories of lessons learned from failure.

In this section, we've provided guidance for tackling those challenges.

1 **Telling Stories When There Is No Impact (Yet)**

What if the story you'd like to tell doesn't end with progress being made? That can actually be a positive thing. Research shows that stories with an ending that is too happy can be demotivating because they make the audience feel as though the work is already done. If your story lacks signs of change, focus instead on articulating your vision and creating a sense of urgency to help realize it.

ARTICULATE YOUR VISION.

Be Aspirational. As you reach the end of your story (or the fourth section of the Story Map), you can transition to the future tense and focus on your vision for change or you can refer to other instances in which similar work has been successful. Describe the world the protagonist is trying to shape and how life for them—and even your audience—would be different if their efforts were successful.

Be Vivid. Psychological research shows that people are more motivated to work toward goals they can actually see in their mind's eye. When describing your aspirational vision, use vivid words that describe people, places or things—and avoid abstract language that people can't visualize.

CREATE A SENSE OF URGENCY.

What's to gain, and what's to lose? Research suggests the best way to create a sense of urgency is to offer a sense of possibility—and pair it with the specter of loss. What would be gained if people act now, and what would be lost if they do not? Answering these questions together conveys the sense that the moment offers a unique opportunity to get involved and bring about change. Finish your call to action by telling people exactly what they can do.

Describe other people taking action. Even if you haven't achieved your ultimate goal, talk about people taking action to get there and describe the positive emotions that correspond with getting involved. Is there a sense of unity, momentum, and/or personal fulfillment? Articulating these emotional benefits can motivate people to help you reach the finish line.

Common Storytelling Challenges

Drawing your vision is a good way to generate vivid language. In the space below, draw two pictures: One of what the world looks like now and one of what the world will look like when your goals are achieved. When you're done, describe each drawing with words and see what language you find yourself using.

Common Storytelling Challenges

2 **Telling Stories About Systems Change**

Advocates often wonder whether they can craft a compelling story about systems change. After all, good stories are about interesting characters—and systems are about rules, policies and customs.

The divide between the two is not as large as people often think. Systems, after all, are the results of actions by individuals over time. Those systems affect individuals—and they can be changed by individuals. To translate systems change into compelling stories, you simply have to zero in on the right characters.

Focus on a protagonist within the system. One common misconception is that stories have to focus exclusively on the people who are benefiting from a cause. While that is effective, you can also craft a very compelling story about people who are embedded in a system or who have the power to spur change.

Avoid overwhelming your audience with complexity. Advocates have an understandable desire to communicate the complexity of systems change to their audiences—but this can backfire. We tend to avoid problems that seem overwhelming because we feel powerless to solve them. Boiling down complex systems to specific, solvable problems can help motivate your audience to take action and make for a more compelling story.

EXERCISE

Think of the part(s) of the food system that you're working to change. Who is one individual within the system whom you could select as a protagonist in your story? What specific actions could they take to begin changing the system?

Common Storytelling Challenges

3 **Telling Stories About Lessons Learned From Failure**

Stories about lessons learned from failure don't have to be demotivating. They can be important vehicles for sharing key takeaways and can speak to the way you approach problems. Internal audiences will be able to refine their work based on your insights, and external audiences will see that you are committed to refining your approach. Effective stories about failure should describe your goal, what went wrong, and what you plan to do differently.

Talk about what the goal was and why it was a worthy effort. Even though you failed to achieve you goal, it's important to let your audience—either internal or external—know what that goal was and why it is still worth pursuing. This will keep the audience focused on what can be achieved if you succeed and why they should continue to support the effort.

Be specific about what went wrong and when you realized it. Demonstrating that you understand exactly what went wrong shows you learn from experience and builds confidence that the next effort will be more successful. One way to do this effectively in a story is to recreate the moment when you or your protagonist realized what went wrong. Helping your audiences understand the emotions of that moment will create empathy and get them to care more about your eventual success.

Discuss what worked. Even though you didn't achieve your ultimate goal, discussing what did work will build confidence in elements of your approach and motivate others to replicate them. Showing how close you came to success also creates a sense of urgency to get the job done and makes your goal seem within reach.

Be aspirational and discuss what you're going to do next. Demonstrate that you're better positioned to succeed in the future because of what you've learned. What do you know now that you can immediately apply to your next effort? Include an aspirational vision of what you can accomplish with these newfound lessons.

EXERCISE

Identify one effort by your organization that didn't achieve its intended results and that you could tell a story about using the criteria above.

How were the messages in this toolkit developed?

The language in this toolkit was developed by Hattaway Communications, informed by conversations with the Food Solutions New England team, feedback from partners and allies, and survey research with people across New England, as outlined below.

Kickoff workshop held with full FSNE network team

Survey of FSNE network members about FSNE's goals and identity

Eight focus groups with FSNE partners and allies across New England and the food system

Follow up workshop with FSNE network members to discuss findings and narrative ideas

Subsequent feedback from the FSNE team on draft narrative elements

A survey of 533 people from across the country to test the updated narrative elements, fielded between February 4th and 14th, 2019.

The language is also informed by insights from cognitive and social psychology, best practices in marketing and strategic communications research, and lessons learned from previous research conducted by Hattaway Communications.

Appendix 1

APPENDIX 1

Message Testing Survey Findings

On the following pages we've included results from the message testing survey we fielded across New England, organized across the elements of the Narrative Structure: People, Goals, Problems, Solutions, and Call to Action. Each section contains response data to an overall question about the language we tested (e.g., "In your opinion, how well does this language describe the people in New England?), detailed findings from the data, and text highlighting results.

Through our questions we collected a combination of quantitative and qualitative data ranging from Likert scale-style opinion data to text highlighting to open response data. For our text highlighting questions, which provide the most direct input on the narrative elements we tested, we asked respondents to highlight words and phrases that they liked or agreed with in green, as well as those they found confusing or unclear in red. In the images included on the following pages, darker colors indicate that more respondents highlighted a particular word or phrase. White text is used to improve readability for the most highlighted words and phrases.

We've also included complete descriptive statistics for respondents in the second appendix starting on page 51.

"PEOPLE" NARRATIVE ELEMENTS

Overall Support

"In your opinion, how well does this language describe the people in New England?"

RESPONSE	COUNT	PERCENT OF DATA
Extremely well	80	15.0%
Very well	213	40.0%
No opinion	44	8.3%
Not very well	151	28.3%
Not well at all	45	8.4%

Insights from Data

Respondents support language describing people in New England as hard working, family and community oriented. Communications science and best practices support this finding, as people are generally more likely to like and support others who share their values and characteristics.
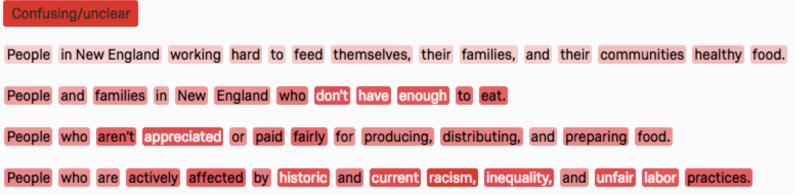
Confusion exists about language describing people in deficit terms. Respondents were most likely to find language in this section describing people as not having enough to eat, not being appreciated for their work, and affected by historic and current racism, inequality, and unfair labor practices as confusing or unclear. Qualitative open response data for this question suggests that many respondents don't feel the negative descriptions reflect their idea of people in New England, and/or that they don't feel racism, inequality, or inequity apply to their community or their state.

Non-white respondents identify with these descriptions more than white respondents. 62.8% of non-white survey respondents said these narrative elements describe the people in New England "very well" or "extremely well," while 48.1% of white respondents said the same. Non-white respondents were more likely to find the second and third narrative elements confusing or unclear than white respondents, while white respondents were more likely to find the last element confusing or unclear.

Less educated respondents identify more with these descriptions. 50% of respondents holding a 2-year degree or less felt these elements described people in New England "very well" or "extremely well." On the other hand, 44% of respondents holding a 4-year degree or more responded "very well" or "extremely well."

Lower income respondents support this language more than higher earning respondents. 57% of respondents earning less than $75,000 per year in household income feel these elements describe people in New England "very well" or "extremely well." Only 35% of respondents earning $75,000 or more responded the same. Higher earning respondents were more likely than lower earning respondents to find statements describing people in New England who aren't paid fairly for producing, distributing, and preparing food confusing or unclear.

Text Highlighting Results

Like/agree

People in New England working hard to feed themselves, their families, and their communities healthy food.

People and families in New England who don't have enough to eat.

People who aren't appreciated or paid fairly for producing, distributing, and preparing food.

People who are actively affected by historic and current racism, inequality, and unfair labor practices.

Confusing/unclear

People in New England working hard to feed themselves, their families, and their communities healthy food.

People and families in New England who don't have enough to eat.

People who aren't appreciated or paid fairly for producing, distributing, and preparing food.

People who are actively affected by historic and current racism, inequality, and unfair labor practices.

Overall Support

"In your opinion, how well does this language describe an ideal New England?"

RESPONSE	COUNT	PERCENT OF DATA
Extremely well	130	24.4%
Very well	240	45.0%
No opinion	32	6.0%
Not very well	87	16.3%
Not well at all	44	8.3%
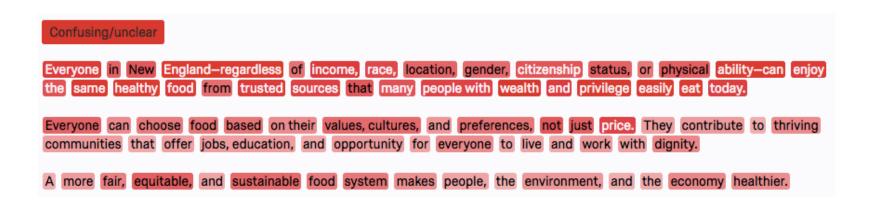
Insights from Data

Comparable support for this language exists across racial/ethnic and educational attainment groups. White respondents were more likely than non-white respondents to highlight "equitable" as confusing or unclear. White respondents generally found the first element more confusing or unclear than non-white respondents.

Higher earning respondents feel this language reflects an ideal New England slightly more than lower earning respondents. Respondents earning $75,000 or more were slightly more likely than those earning less than $75,000 to find the last narrative element confusing or unclear. That being said, 77% of higher earning respondents felt these elements described an ideal New England "very well" or "extremely well," while 68.5% of lower earning respondents answered the same.

Text Highlighting Results

Like/agree

Everyone in New England—regardless of income, race, location, gender, citizenship status, or physical ability—can enjoy the same healthy food from trusted sources that many people with wealth and privilege easily eat today.

Everyone can choose food based on their values, cultures, and preferences, not just price. They contribute to thriving communities that offer jobs, education, and opportunity for everyone to live and work with dignity.

A more fair, equitable, and sustainable food system makes people, the environment, and the economy healthier.

Confusing/unclear

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A more fair, equitable, and sustainable food system makes people, the environment, and the economy healthier.

Overall Support

"In your opinion, how well does this language describe the issues preventing people in New England from having enough to eat?"

RESPONSE	COUNT	PERCENT OF DATA
Extremely well	110	20.6%
Very well	233	43.7%
No opinion	67	12.6%
Not very well	82	15.4%
Not well at all	41	7.7%

Insights from Data

Comparable overall support exists for these statements across educational attainment and racial/ ethnic groups. That being said, respondents were most confused about the word "monopolize" in this section. In particular, non-white respondents were more likely to find the third narrative element in which that word appears confusing or unclear than white respondents. Respondents who'd earned a bachelor's degree or higher were more likely to find this element confusing or unclear than those who'd earned less than a bachelor's degree.

Non-white respondents appear to identify with discrimination and expense as problems more than white respondents. Non-white respondents were more likely to highlight that they liked or agreed with "discrimination" and "expensive" in the first narrative element in this section than non-white respondents.

Lower income respondents agree that these problems prevent people in New England from accessing healthy food more than higher earning respondents. 66% of respondents earning less than $75,000 indicated that these elements describe the issues preventing people in New England from having enough to eat "very well" or "extremely well," while only 49% of respondents earning $75,000 or more answered the same. Higher earning respondents were more likely than lower earning respondents to find the third element in this statement confusing or unclear, though lower earning respondents were more likely to find the words "consolidate" and "monopolize" confusing or unclear than higher earning respondents.

Text Highlighting Results

Like/agree

Healthy food is easy to get for some people, but expensive or far away for others. Discrimination in education, employment, and housing prevents many minority and low-income people from cultivating and enjoying gardens, grocery stores, and farm-to-fork programs in their neighborhoods. Many people with wealth and privilege can choose what they want to eat, while those without too often can't.

Too many of the farmers, fishermen, and people who process, distribute, and prepare the food we eat don't get the respect, support, or fair pay they deserve for their hard work. They're often invisible to the people who eat the food they produce, and many are oppressed, mistreated, and underpaid in order to make cheap food cheap.

Corporate food companies from outside of the region consolidate their power, monopolize markets, and wield unfair influence over policies and political investments. They take money out of New England while they hide the ways they hurt their workers, the environment, and their consumers in our region.

Many people in New England who would benefit from a more just food system don't realize that, collectively, they have the power to create large scale change. They don't know what to do, don't know where their allies are, or lack the time, money, and energy they need to organize and advocate for

Confusing/unclear

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Many people in New England who would benefit from a more just food system don't realize that, collectively, they have the power to create large scale change. They don't know what to do, don't know where their allies are, or lack the time, money, and energy they need to organize and advocate for change.

"SOLUTIONS" NARRATIVE ELEMENTS

Overall Support

"In your opinion, how likely is it that these solutions would help more people in New England eat more healthy food?"

RESPONSE	COUNT	PERCENT OF DATA
Extremely well	199	37.3%
Very well	182	34.1%
No opinion	95	17.8%
Not very well	33	6.2%
Not well at all	24	4.5%

Insights from Data

Non-white respondents appear to understand and support justice for current and historical racism more than white respondents. White respondents were more likely than non-white respondents to find the last statement about people and communities using their voices to demand justice for those affected by historical and current racism and other forms of discrimination in the food system confusing or unclear. Non-white respondents were more likely to find the third element in this section confusing or unclear than white respondents.

Lower income respondents were more confused by policymaking solutions than higher earning respondents. Lower earning respondents were more likely to find the third solution element confusing or unclear than higher earning respondents, particularly the language around policies and practices.

Text Highlighting Results

Like/agree

State-level and community-based programs and policies help low-income people, especially in minority communities, get the education, jobs, and housing they need to eat the healthy food they deserve. Companies and nonprofit organizations work side-by-side to make sure healthy food gets from the people who make it to the people who need it—all at a fair price for everyone.

Everyone in New England appreciates and values the community of people working together to catch, raise, grow, prepare, and share food across the region, and demands that these workers receive the money and support they deserve. No one tolerates injustice or oppression anywhere in the food system.

Policies and practices ensure that everyone in New England can eat more food that's produced in New England, and that no outside corporation has an unfair advantage in how food is produced, distributed, prepared, and sold.

People and communities across New England use their diverse voices to demand justice for those affected by historical and current racism and other forms of discrimination in the food system.

Confusing/unclear

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People and communities across New England use their diverse voices to demand justice for those affected by historical and current racism and other forms of discrimination in the food system.

"CALL TO ACTION" NARRATIVE ELEMENTS

Overall Support

"How likely are these messages overall to motivate you to change your behavior when it comes to buying, preparing, or eating food?"

RESPONSE	COUNT	PERCENT OF DATA
Extremely well	83	15.6%
Very well	181	34.0%
No opinion	218	40.9%
Not very well	31	5.8%
Not well at all	20	3.8%

How likely are these messages overall to motivate you to get involved in your community, your state, or even in national politics?

RESPONSE	COUNT	PERCENT OF DATA
Extremely well	73	13.7%
Very well	157	29.5%
No opinion	216	40.5%
Not very well	49	9.2%
Not well at all	38	7.1%

Insights from Data

The narrative elements tested in this survey didn't have a huge effect on respondents' motivation to change their own behavior when it comes to buying, preparing, or eating food. 40% of respondents earning less than $75,000 per year and 45% of those earning $75,000 or more indicated that they were neither likely nor unlikely to change their behavior. That being said, non-white respondents were also much more likely to indicate that they were "very likely" or "extremely likely" to change their behavior than white respondents—56% vs. 43%.

Overall, the narrative elements tested in this survey were more likely to motivate lower earning and non-white respondents to get involved in their community, their state, or in national politics. 44% of lower earning respondents indicated that they were "very likely" or "extremely likely" to get involved, while only 29% of higher earning respondents said the same. 50% of non-white respondents answered that these messages were "very likely" or "extremely likely" to motivate them to get involved in their community, state, or national politics, while only 36% of white respondents said the same.

Text Highlighting Results

Like/agree

There are many ways to be involved in creating a healthy, just and strong food system for all of New England, now and into the future.

Help create a food system that strengthens our local economy, provides healthy good food to all our people, and takes care of the land and sea so that future generations can do the same.

Confusing/unclear

There are many ways to be involved in creating a healthy, just and strong food system for all of New England, now and into the future.

Help create a food system that strengthens our local economy, provides healthy good food to all our people, and takes care of the land and sea so that future generations can do the same.

Appendix 2

Descriptive Statistics

Our message testing survey reflects a diverse group of people in New England, with particular emphasis on non-white lower income people. We have included some basic descriptive statistics of the survey sample below.

Gender

	COUNT	PERCENT OF DATA
Female	83	15.6%
Male	181	34.0%

Race/Ethnicity

	COUNT	PERCENT OF DATA
White/Caucasian	285	53.5%
Black/African American	114	21.4%
Hispanic or Latino/Latina	77	14.4%
Asian	28	5.3%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	12	2.3%
Pacific Islander	1	0.2%
Other [Please Specify]	16	3.0%

State of Residence

	COUNT	PERCENT OF DATA
Massachusetts	221	41.5%
Connecticut	142	26.6%
Maine	53	9.9%
New Hampshire	46	8.6%
Rhode Island	44	8.3%
Vermont	27	5.1%

Age

	COUNT	PERCENT OF DATA
18 - 24	86	16.1%
25 - 34	95	17.8%
35 - 44	83	15.6%
45 - 54	112	21.0%
55 - 64	74	13.9%
65+	83	15.6%

Income

	COUNT	PERCENT OF DATA
Less than $15,000	90	16.9%
$15,000–$24,999	90	16.9%
$25,000–$49,999	178	33.4%
$50,000–$74,999	118	22.1%
$75,000–$99,999	32	6.0%
$100,000–$149,000	17	3.2%
$150,000 or more	8	1.5%

Number of People in Household

	COUNT	PERCENT OF DATA
Just me	123	23.1%
2	186	34.9%
3	102	19.1%
4	69	12.9%
5	30	5.6%
6	16	3.0%
7	3	0.6%
8 or more	4	0.8%

Household Income by Household Size

Household Income	Number of People in Household							
	Just me	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 or more
Less than $15,000	23.6%	10.8%	22.5%	8.7%	33.3%	12.5%	0.0%	0.0%
$15,000–$24,999	24.4%	17.7%	12.7%	7.2%	20.0%	12.5%	33.3%	0.0%
$25,000–$49,999	35.8%	37.6%	30.4%	33.3%	16.7%	18.8%	33.3%	25.0%
$50,000–$74,999	12.2%	21.0%	22.5%	37.7%	26.7%	31.3%	0.0%	50.0%
$75,000–$99,999	4.1%	7.5%	4.9%	5.8%	3.3%	18.8%	0.0%	0.0%
$100,000–$149,000	0.0%	4.8%	2.9%	4.3%	0.0%	6.3%	0.0%	25.0%
$150,000 or more	0.0%	0.5%	3.9%	2.9%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%

Geography

	COUNT	PERCENT OF DATA
Suburban	200	37.5%
Urban	176	33.0%
Rural	157	29.5%

Educational Attainment

	COUNT	PERCENT OF DATA
Less than high school	14	2.6%
High school graduate	146	27.4%
Some college	134	25.1%
2 year degree	59	11.1%
4 year degree	119	22.3%
Professional degree	58	10.9%
Doctorate	3	0.6%

Profession

	COUNT	PERCENT OF DATA
Hourly Wage Worker (Waiter, Barista, Stocker, Bellhop, etc.)	101	18.9%
White Collar / Office Worker (includes executive management, middle management, and individual contributors)	94	17.6%
Business Owner / Self-Employed	67	12.6%
Healthcare Professional (Not Physician / Doctor)	61	11.4%
Educator (Professor, Teacher, Coach, etc.)	42	7.9%
Professional / Technical / Scientific	40	7.5%
Arts / Literary / Culinary	37	6.9%
Education Administration / Support Services	23	4.3%
Construction / Tradesman / Skilled Laborer (Painter, Mechanic, Plumber, etc.)	22	4.1%
Entertainment / Sports / Media	17	3.2%
Professional Driver / Delivery Driver	11	2.1%
Farming / Ranching	7	1.3%
Lawyer / Attorney	4	0.8%
Physician / Doctor / General Practitioner (MD, DO, etc.)	4	0.8%
Military / Law Enforcement / Fire / Emergency Services	3	0.6%

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