



## Factsheet: Transformational Storytelling

Storytelling comes in many forms. It is an ancient tool which facilitates connection, enables communication, contributes to creative sense-making, and is considered part of how culture(s) form and transform. In our perspective as facilitators and storytellers, we view storytelling as one of many tools to facilitate systems transformation. Such narratives—which catalyze change—is what we call “transformational storytelling”.

Below are some thoughts on elements of transformational storytelling:

- It has critique; it is not merely a recap or summary of events.
- It includes thought-provoking prompts and questions
- It leaves you with generative questions. In fact, sometimes it leaves you with more questions than answers.
- It functions to support us to imagine beyond our circumstances/ideas/conditions. It is guided by the nudge: “What else is possible?”
- It is not limited to traditional media. It uses a multiplicity of tools available and accessible to the communities that are telling the story.
- It is not extractive. It starts with equity as default, and seeks to meaningfully represent and collaborate with voices that are systematically excluded and marginalized.

### Data, Stories and You:

Stories are the soul of data. They exist *within* the numbers and charts in our reports. They can help us better understand those who contributed to the collection and curation of that data. Storytelling can be a tool that helps us reflect on the ‘big picture’, understand nuances, and shift perspectives.

In fact, data and stories create the most impact when they are combined. Quantitative data (numbers) can be powerful in making bold statements. However, when taken independently (stories separate from the numbers), this kind of data may not provide nuance. Numbers are often a periodic snapshot of a community, whereas stories provide the context needed to make better policies and decisions.

### Systems Transformation

Systems transformation involves tackling our most pressing problems and leveraging previously unimagined possibilities. It includes changing underlying patterns, narratives, relationships,



values, and norms. It requires a shift in our mindsets and paradigms so as to reimagine power and address inequities through an intersectional lens.

The narratives we tell, believe and repeat to ourselves and each other uphold many of the systems that are currently not fair, just and equitable.

Alongside Andrew Paul from the Edmonton Community Foundation, CFC's most recent Transformation Storytelling Fellows—Inda Intiar and Njoki Mbürũ—share their experiences and lessons learned from using storytelling as a tool to facilitate systems transformation, create a sense of belonging, and imagine equitable and sustainable futures.

#### **Takeaways:**

- Systems transformation is a personal and collective process. As we work to transform the systems we are part of, we are also transformed in the process
- The process of transformation is non-linear. Our most important learnings come from the “messy middle” moments where we are left with more questions than answers.
- Stories provide soul and necessary context to data.
- The relationships we build with storyholders matter more than our deadlines, bylines, and timelines.
- Tangible examples and stories add soul to the data and make it relatable.
- Each of our stories matter.

#### **Questions for future discussions and conversations:**

- What are the stories within the data?
- How can those stories help shift narratives and create a pathway for systems transformation?
- How are you thinking about imagination and dreaming as tools for systems transformation?
- How are philanthropists making room for transformational storytelling in the sector?
- What kinds of opportunities are you creating to meaningfully engage youth as collaborators in reimagining philanthropy?

#### **Resources and Toolkits:**

- [Transformation Catalysts: Weaving Transformational Change for a Flourishing World for All](#)
- [CFC Transformation Storytelling Fellowship](#)
- [CFC Transformation Model](#)
- [Lessons from a transformational storytelling fellowship](#)
- [Edmonton Community Foundation podcast and other storytelling pieces](#)
- Sites of Power storytelling tool: Please reach out directly to Njoki for this.



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