

CRISES AS A CATALYST 2.0

*A Toolkit for Thriving
Through Uncertainty*

NARRATIVE STEWARDSHIP

*A workbook to support board members with navigating crises
by using their voice and influence to champion organizations*

WORKBOOK 4

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PURPOSE

This workbook is part of the Crises as a Catalyst 2.0 series, which explores how social sector leaders and boards can strengthen organizations during periods of uncertainty, disruption, and social change. Each workbook offers reflection prompts and practical tools to help leaders remain grounded in purpose while navigating complexity.

THIS WORKBOOK IS FOR BOARD MEMBERS WHO:

- Feel unsure about how to speak publicly about the organization when they are not involved in the day-to-day work
- Believe in equity and inclusion, but not yet confident in how to explain how those commitments show up in the organization's strategy and impact
- Care deeply about the mission but want clarity in how they can use their voice, influence, and relationships in practical ways
- Feel stretched thin and uncertain about how sharing the organization fits into an already full plate

This workbook offers reflection prompts and practices to help board members build confidence in how they speak about the organization's purpose and impact. Narrative stewardship strengthens trust, reinforces shared responsibility, and expands understanding of the work in the broader community.

Navigating Crises Through Narrative Stewardship

Narrative stewardship for board members refers to the role you play in reinforcing what an organization stands for through how you speak about its mission, impact, and importance in everyday conversations.

When board members practice narrative stewardship, they help shape how the organization is understood in the community and in their personal and professional networks. In a time when nonprofit work is often misunderstood, clear and thoughtful storytelling helps others better understand the organization's mission and impact.

Narrative stewardship does not mean speaking on behalf of staff or communities without alignment. Rather, it means reinforcing the organization's purpose and values in ways that reflect shared understanding with leadership.

Board members help expand awareness of the organization through their networks. The way you describe the mission and impact helps others understand why the work matters. When board members speak clearly and personally about the work, staff know they are not carrying the responsibility of telling the organization's story alone.

Three Crises Through the Lens of Narrative Stewardship

Crisis of Disinvestment and Downsizing

When funding becomes uncertain, narrative stewardship begins internally. Your role is to ensure scarcity does not quietly erode purpose. Board members anchor organizations in their values when budgets shift, reinforcing that financial pressure does not equate to mission failure.

Crisis of Political Weaponization and Retaliation

Increased scrutiny of justice-focused work can create subtle pressure to back away from equity commitments. Boards can reinforce the shared vision and support leaders to stay focused on the values guiding the work and a commitment to equity in access, safety, and resources for us all.

Crisis of Uncertainty and Volatile Change

Cumulative unexpected changes, constant policy shifts, and ongoing uncertainty can lead to fatigue and reactive decision-making. Board members can provide steadiness. Consistent, grounded reinforcement of purpose helps organizations stay anchored when external conditions shift.

Day-to-Day Narrative Practices for Board Members

Know your anchor. Be ready to explain what the organization does, who it serves, why the work matters, and what makes the approach distinct, in your own words.

Speak with specificity. Move beyond general praise. Reference a program outcome, a community need, or a recent impact milestone when the organization comes up.

Reinforce values consistently. Describe equity as a commitment to access and opportunity. Don't dilute core commitments out of fear alone.

Show up with presence. Stay informed through updates and board materials. Ask questions in meetings that reinforce long-term purpose and mission impact.

Affirm leadership publicly and privately. Express confidence in the organization's direction. Avoid language that unintentionally distances the board from staff.

Use digital platforms thoughtfully. When appropriate, share an organizational update, highlight an impact milestone, or amplify a message from leadership.

Board Member Quick Reference & Practice Guide

Use this page as a reminder of how to integrate narrative stewardship into your role throughout the year. Small, consistent actions build clarity and trust over time.

1. Know Your Anchor

- I can explain the organization's mission clearly in my own words.
- I am clear on why this work matters to me personally.
- I understand the organization's current priorities and challenges well enough to speak about them confidently.

*PRACTICE:

Write a short "why this matters" statement and revisit it quarterly.

2. Speak with Specificity

- I can share at least one recent example of impact.
- I reference concrete outcomes rather than general praise.
- I connect the organization's work to real-world change in communities.

*PRACTICE:

Before an event or meeting, choose one story or data point you can share naturally.

3. Reinforce Values Consistently

- I speak about equity, inclusion, and thriving communities as central to the mission.
- I do not dilute the organization's core commitments out of fear alone.
- My public comments align with leadership's strategy and shared language.

***PRACTICE:**

Identify one common misconception about the work and prepare a response grounded in organizational values.

4. Show Up with Presence

- I stay informed through updates and board materials.
- I ask questions that reinforce long-term purpose, not just short-term reaction.
- I demonstrate steady engagement, not only during moments of crisis.

***PRACTICE:**

In your next board meeting, intentionally reinforce the mission in one comment or question.

5. Affirm Leadership

- I publicly express confidence in the organization's direction when appropriate.
- I avoid language that unintentionally distances the board from staff.
- I help ensure staff are not carrying the organization's narrative alone.

***PRACTICE:**

Send a brief note acknowledging a recent milestone or impact, and amplify that affirmation within your networks when appropriate.

Why Your Voice Matters

Board service is an act of commitment. You have chosen to lend your time, perspective, relationships, and credibility to an organization working to make a meaningful difference in the world. That choice matters.

In nonprofit organizations, leaders and staff often carry the visible responsibility of implementation. They design programs, steward partnerships, manage teams, and navigate the daily realities of advancing the mission.

Board members play a different, but equally important, role. You help anchor the organization in purpose, integrity, and long-term vision. One of the most powerful ways you do that is through how you speak about the work.

When you talk about the mission with clarity, share why it matters to you personally, and help others understand the impact of the work, you strengthen the organization's ability to thrive. Your voice expands the circle of understanding and support around the mission.

When boards consistently reinforce the organization's mission and values, staff feel supported, communities feel affirmed, and the story of the work remains grounded in its deepest purpose.

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

As we close, take a moment to sit with these reflections:

- What feels most meaningful to me about narrative stewardship?
- Where do I feel more clarity than I did before?
- What one shift am I willing to make in how I speak about the organization?
- How do I want leadership and staff to experience me as a board member during challenging times?

REFLECTION SPACE

Notice what surfaces from the questions above and capture what feels most important to carry forward.
