



Staff and Board Discussion Prompts

Building Alignment Around “The Moment”

These prompts are designed to help your organization build a shared understanding of the current moment you are operating in — and to translate that understanding into clearer decisions, stronger messaging, and more confident leadership.

You do **not** need to answer every question. Choose 3–5 that feel most relevant.

1. Naming the Moment (Shared Reality)

Purpose: Align on what feels most urgent and defining right now.

- What pressures or changes feel most present for our organization today?
- Where do we feel uncertainty, risk, or strain?
- What has changed most significantly for our community in the past 12–18 months?
- What questions are coming up repeatedly—from staff, board, partners, or funders?

Facilitator Tip:

Ask participants to name *patterns*, not isolated issues. What keeps coming up?

2. Values Check (How We Want to Show Up)

Purpose: Clarify what values should guide decisions and messaging.

- Which of our values feel most important to lead with in this moment?
- Are there values we say we uphold that feel harder to practice right now?
- Where are we being asked to compromise—and where should we not?

Optional Exercise:

Have participants choose **one value they believe must not be compromised**, even under pressure.

3. Our Role & Responsibility (Strategic Positioning)

Purpose: Focus energy and avoid mission drift.

- What does our organization provide that others cannot?
- Where do we add the most value—culturally, relationally, or historically?
- What expectations are being placed on us that may *not* align with our mission?

Facilitator Language:

“This isn’t about doing more—it’s about doing what only we can do.”

4. Alignment Across the Organization

Purpose: Surface disconnects before they become barriers.

- Do staff, leadership, and board describe our work in the same way?
- Are we telling the same story in fundraising, programming, and governance?
- Where do we see confusion or mixed signals?

Quick Check:

Ask two people to independently describe the organization’s current focus in one sentence. Compare responses.

5. Turning Narrative into Action

Purpose: Connect discussion to real operational decisions.

- How should our understanding of “the moment” shape:
 - funding priorities?
 - program design?
 - board recruitment or engagement?
- What is one decision we need to revisit in light of this framing?

Example Prompt:

“If we truly believe this is a moment of cultural preservation and care, what should that change about how we allocate resources?”

6. Drafting a Shared Statement

Purpose: Create a usable takeaway.

Prompt:

Complete this sentence together:

“In this moment, our organization exists to...”

Use this statement as:

- an internal alignment tool
- a starting point for grant language
- a guide for leadership talking points

Closing Reflection

End with one quick question:

- What is one thing we can stop doing, start doing, or say differently as a result of this conversation?



Narrative Audit Checklist: Aligning Language with Mission and Impact

Use this tool to assess whether your communications—across development, programming, digital, and internal channels—reflect a clear, compelling, and values-based narrative that supports your goals and connects with your community.

1. Messaging Relevance & Responsiveness

Ask: Are we speaking to the current moment?

- Do our website and public materials reflect the urgency and challenges facing our communities?
- Are we naming the external pressures (e.g., policy, funding, cultural tensions) our organization is responding to?
- Are we showing how our work is *part of the solution*, not just what we do?

Example:

Instead of: "We provide workshops for youth in underserved neighborhoods."

Try: "As young people face increasing disconnection and systemic barriers, our workshops create space for joy, identity, and collective power."

2. Centering Community in the Narrative

Ask: Are those most impacted visible in our stories?

- Do our stories include direct voices from community members or program participants?
- Are we avoiding language that objectifies or flattens people's experiences?
- Are we acknowledging the leadership, resilience, and cultural wealth of the communities we serve?

Example:

Swap "we help the voiceless" → "we amplify the voices already leading change."

3. Consistency Across Departments

Ask: Is our narrative showing up everywhere?

- Do our fundraising decks, program descriptions, and strategic plans reflect the same core story?
- Is our leadership using consistent language when talking to funders, media, or board members?
- Are we reinforcing a clear narrative through our social media captions, event programs, and newsletters?

Tip:

Run a quick scan of your most-used templates—are your "About Us" blurbs consistent?

4. Tone & Language Choices

Ask: Does our language build trust and connection?

- Are we using plain language over jargon?
- Are we naming our values explicitly (e.g., equity, joy, accountability)?
- Are we using a tone that reflects care, agency, and hope—not just need or crisis?

Example from a revised appeal:

“In a year when our community faced repeated attacks, we stood together—hosting healing workshops, sharing stories, and creating space for joy.”

5. Specific Audit Areas

For each of these touchpoints, rate alignment on a scale of 1 (Not Aligned) to 5 (Strongly Aligned):

Material	Alignment Score	Notes / Changes Needed
Website – About Us page	____ / 5	
Social Media Bio / Recent Posts	____ / 5	
Fundraising Appeals / Grant Boilerplate	____ / 5	
Board Slide Deck	____ / 5	
Program Descriptions (flyers, web)	____ / 5	
Internal Comms (e.g., staff memos)	____ / 5	

Final Reflection

After reviewing your materials:

- What language or tone *needs to change*?
- What parts of your narrative feel powerful or consistent?
- What's one piece of content you'll update this month to reflect your current narrative?



Language & Tone Style Guide Toolkit

Practical guidance for cultural nonprofits to align their communications with values, mission, and voice.

Purpose of This Guide

This toolkit is designed to help your organization build a consistent, values-aligned approach to messaging — even if you don't have a full-time communications team. A simple tone and language guide can help staff, volunteers, and leadership communicate more clearly and authentically, whether in social media, fundraising asks, board decks, or public programs.

What's Inside

1. Voice & Tone Overview
2. Core Message Pillars
3. Do/Don't Language Examples
4. Values-Based Vocabulary Guide
5. Templates for Adaptation
6. Checklist for Use

1. Voice & Tone Overview

Use this section to define how your organization *sounds* across materials. Keep it simple and relatable.

Trait	Description	Example
Clear	Avoid jargon, use plain language	“Our museum welcomes every learner” vs. “We are an experiential STEAM-driven platform”
Warm	Emphasize humanity and connection	“You belong here” vs. “Access provided to all patrons”
Confident	Own your impact and value	“Our programs change lives” vs. “We try to make a difference”

2. Core Message Pillars

Identify 3–4 communication themes that should appear across channels.

Pillar	Sample Language
Community Power	“Rooted in our neighborhood, led by its stories.”
Intergenerational Learning	“Our programs welcome curiosity at every age.”
Cultural Preservation & Innovation	“We honor tradition while imagining new futures.”

3. Do/Don’t Language Examples

Instead of...	Say...
“We serve underprivileged communities.”	“We work with underinvested communities.”
“Our diverse programming...”	“Programming created with and for our community.”

“Marginalized voices”	“Historically excluded voices” or name specific communities
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This makes language **asset-based**, not deficit-based — and easier to use in grants, marketing, or mission statements.

4. Values-Based Vocabulary Guide

A glossary of intentional word choices to align language with impact.

Term	Suggested Alternative	Notes
“Minority”	“Global majority” or name specific community	Center identity, not lack
“At-risk youth”	“Young leaders” or “youth navigating barriers”	Avoids framing through risk
“Target audience”	“Intended audience” or “community partners”	Less extractive, more collaborative
“Stakeholders”	“Community collaborators,” “supporters,” “neighbors”	Clarifies relationships

5. Templates for Adaptation

Include a few editable examples like:

- **Social media caption template:**

This month at [Org Name], we’re lifting up [program/people/value] to [impact/goal]. Join us.

- **Program description blurb:**

*[Program Name] brings together [audience] to explore [theme] through [activity].
Created with input from [community/collaborator].*

- **Boilerplate mission paragraph:**

[Org Name] is a community-rooted cultural space dedicated to [core mission]. Through storytelling, education, and celebration, we create space for [audience] to connect, learn, and imagine futures together.

6. Checklist for Everyday Use

Before publishing or presenting communications:

- Does this align with our voice and tone?
- Are we naming our community clearly and respectfully?
- Are we leading with values and agency — not deficit framing?
- Is the language accessible, clear, and jargon-free?
- Would someone unfamiliar with our field understand this?



DOCUMENTING THE MOMENT

Presented by Laura Herrera

Framing Worksheet: Defining 'the moment'

This worksheet helps your institution develop a clear, values-based narrative about the current moment—one that can be shared across staff, board, funders, and partners. Use this framing to guide messaging, funding proposals, programming strategy, and staff/board communications.

Section 1: External Landscape – What You're Responding To

Prompt: What current external conditions are shaping the realities of your organization and community?

- Policy or legal shifts (local, state, federal)
- Funding environment (grant restrictions, loss of support, new opportunities)
- Community needs or crises (violence, migration, economic strain)
- Cultural or public sentiment (polarization, activism, dis/misinformation)

Example:

“Our community is facing increased displacement due to housing insecurity, while our immigrant families are impacted by shifting federal immigration policies.”

Section 2: Internal Reflection – How You're Processing It

Prompt: What conversations or tensions are surfacing internally as your organization navigates this?

- Staff burnout or turnover
- Board misalignment or questions about direction
- Programmatic shifts or mission reevaluation
- Competing demands vs. core capacity

Example:

“We’re trying to do more with less, while keeping our team inspired and our board aligned around long-term goals.”

Section 3: Values Check – What You Stand For

Prompt: What values do you want to lead with, *especially* in this moment?

Choose 3–5 values that you want your narrative to reflect. These could include:

- Equity
- Transparency
- Solidarity
- Joy
- Cultural preservation
- Intergenerational leadership
- Creative resistance

Example:

“In this moment, we want to lead with *cultural resilience*, *community care*, and *intergenerational storytelling*.”

Section 4: Organizational Role – What You Offer

Prompt: What are you uniquely positioned to contribute in this landscape?

- Cultural or historical context
- Trusted community relationships
- Space for gathering or dialogue
- Youth-centered programming
- Healing or joy through the arts

Example:

“As a trusted anchor for local Afro-Caribbean culture, we provide intergenerational space to process, imagine, and organize.”

Section 5: Your Moment – Drafting a Narrative

Write a 2–3 sentence “narrative of now” for your organization. This can be used on your website, in funding proposals, or internally to align your team.

Prompt formula:

In this moment of [context/challenge], we are [core action or value-driven response], because we believe [aspiration or mission tie-in].

Example:

“In this moment of rising anti-immigrant sentiment and economic precarity, we are deepening our youth leadership programs and cultural storytelling work—because we believe our community’s future depends on reclaiming space, joy, and agency.”