

CHICAGO CULTURAL ALLIANCE

MEETING THE MOMENT



TELLING YOUR STORY

Building a Brand Narrative

*Presented by : Laura Herrera, Chief Marketing Officer,
Griffin Museum of Science and Industry*

SPONSORS



THE CHICAGO
COMMUNITY TRUST®

EQUITY • OPPORTUNITY • PROSPERITY

The Chicago Community Trust

MacArthur
Foundation

MacArthur Foundation



CHICAGO
CULTURAL
ALLIANCE



INTRODUCTIONS

Laura Herrera

Chief Marketing & Revenue Officer,
Griffin Museum of Science and Industry

Laura Herrera is a cultural leader, strategist, and entrepreneur with two decades of experience advancing mission-driven organizations. As Chief Marketing and Revenue Officer at the Griffin Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, she leads integrated strategies to grow audiences, revenue, and brand impact while positioning the museum for its 2033 centennial vision.



AGENDA

01 What a brand narrative is (and isn't)

02 A simple story framework: Who, What, Why, So What

03 Making one story work across audiences

04 Tools to draft, refine, and use your narrative

05 Reflection & next steps



WHY STORY MATTERS NOW

- Increased competition for funding
- Greater scrutiny of mission and relevance
- Shorter attention spans
- Communities under pressure and fatigue
- Story is not extra — it is infrastructure



WHAT IS A BRAND NARRATIVE?



- **A brand narrative is:**
 - A shared internal story
 - A foundation for external messaging
 - A guide for decision-making
- **A brand narrative is not:**
 - A tagline
 - A logo
 - A campaign

TELL THE STORY

WHY BRAND NARRATIVES FAIL

- Common challenges
- Too long or vague
- Program lists instead of purpose
- Written for “everyone”
- Sounds like every other nonprofit
- Inconsistent across teams
 - **Resource:** Brand Narrative Quality Check



THE CORE STORY FRAMEWORK



- Four questions that anchor your story
 - Who you are
 - What you do
 - Why it matters
 - So what — what changes because you exist
- ***Resource:** Brand Narrative Worksheet



WHO & WHAT

- **Who you are**

- Your role in relationship to community
- What you steward, protect, or hold

- **What you do**

- The core purpose of your work
- Outcomes, not program lists



WHY & SO WHAT

Meaning and momentum

- Why it matters
 - What's happening in your community right now
 - What values guide your response
- So what
 - What shifts because you exist
 - What you want others to understand or support



AUDIENCE MATTERS



One story. Multiple doorways.

- You do not need different stories for:
 - Funders
 - Community members
 - Board
 - Public
- You need different emphasis.



WHY AUDIENCE FEELS HARD

Why organizations get stuck here

- “We have too many audiences”
- “Funders want one thing, community wants another”
- “We don’t want to say the wrong thing”
- “Everything feels political right now”

**This is not a messaging problem.
It’s a confidence problem.**



WHAT EACH AUDIENCE IS ACTUALLY LISTENING FOR

Common audiences & what they're tuning into

Funders

- Why this matters now
- What changes because of this work
- Confidence and relevance

Community members

- Do I belong here?
- Do you see and respect us?
- Is this for us or about us?

Board members

- Strategic clarity
- Direction and focus
- Risk and sustainability

Public / media

- Why should I care?
- What makes this distinct?
- What's the human meaning?



WHAT CHANGES (AND WHAT DOESN'T)

What stays the same

- Core purpose
- Values
- Community commitments

What shifts

- Opening sentence
- Examples you choose
- Call to action

Same story. Different spotlight.



DRAFTING YOUR NARRATIVE



What we're not doing live

- Writing a finished narrative
- Perfecting language

What we are doing

- Building clarity
- Identifying where you feel stuck
 - Which part of your story feels hardest to articulate right now?

CHICAGO CULTURAL ALLIANCE
**MEETING
THE
MOMENT**



THE TOOLSET (HOW IT FITS TOGETHER)

- Brand Narrative Foundation Worksheet
 - → Draft your story
- Brand Narrative Quality Check
 - → Strengthen and refine
- Audience Translation Guide
 - → Apply it everywhere



WHERE YOUR NARRATIVE LIVES

- Practical applications
 - Website “About” page
 - Grant boilerplate
 - Board decks
 - Program descriptions
 - Staff onboarding
 - EVERYWHERE!
- **Remember:** Clarity reduces friction



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Your story already exists
- Clarity builds trust
- One strong narrative can serve many needs
- You don't need more content — you need clearer language.



REFLECTION & CLOSE

- Where could a clearer story reduce stress or confusion in your organization right now?



Q&A



THANK YOU !

