

Communications in Chaotic Times

By Joel Meyers, Director of Communications, GlobalWA



Working together, we are stronger. Photo: Tumisu/Pixabay

On February 26, 2025, GlobalWA's Communications Collective held a closed-door webinar for our members. As part of the registration, we asked key questions to provide us with insights into the main challenges our members were facing related to current executive orders to help us tune our discussion. We held an active, participatory 75-minute session primarily focused on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) in communications in the current political environment, yet nearly all of the takeaways below apply to any communications.

To inform and guide the dialogue, we invited communications experts [Mikki Dragoo](#), Partner at [Stronger Stories](#), and [Matthew Tsang](#), Brand Director and Co-founder of [AndHumanity](#). Stronger Stories is a strategic and creative consultancy that uses the power of story to build belief in good ideas. AndHumanity is an integrated inclusive marketing and communications agency with the core purpose of serving people-first brands.

Note: This article is a recap of the discussions including resources and guidance. Other than the presenters, all members' contributions have been anonymized. In attendance

were a variety of members across the spectrum of small to large with a range of program focus areas.

We initiated the conversation with opening remarks from Joel Meyers, Director of Communications at GlobalWA:

The Trump administration is implementing “shock and awe” and “flood the zone” tactics to create chaos and confusion, and manufacture fear to bully our populace into submission to the administration’s aims.

Do not give into this fear. Think critically and consult your lawyers and experts to determine your path forward, and of course, be in community – do not stand on the sidelines...act. To give into fear and the belief that this is all hopeless is conceding to their strategy. We stand stronger together.

KEY FINDINGS

Mikki took the stage by reviewing the key findings from the registration survey, which was completed by 41 registrants.

Common themes and questions from the registration survey:

1. **Disillusionment & fatigue** – Is this the new reality?
2. **Fear & self-censorship** – Are organizations staying too silent?
3. **Organizational survival & adaptation** – How do we pivot while sustaining impact?
4. **DEIA skepticism** – How do we ensure efforts are meaningful, not performative?
5. **Advocacy challenges** – How do we engage people in critical causes?

These themes were addressed directly and indirectly throughout the conversation. More below.

SHIFTING PARADIGMS & MOVING FORWARD

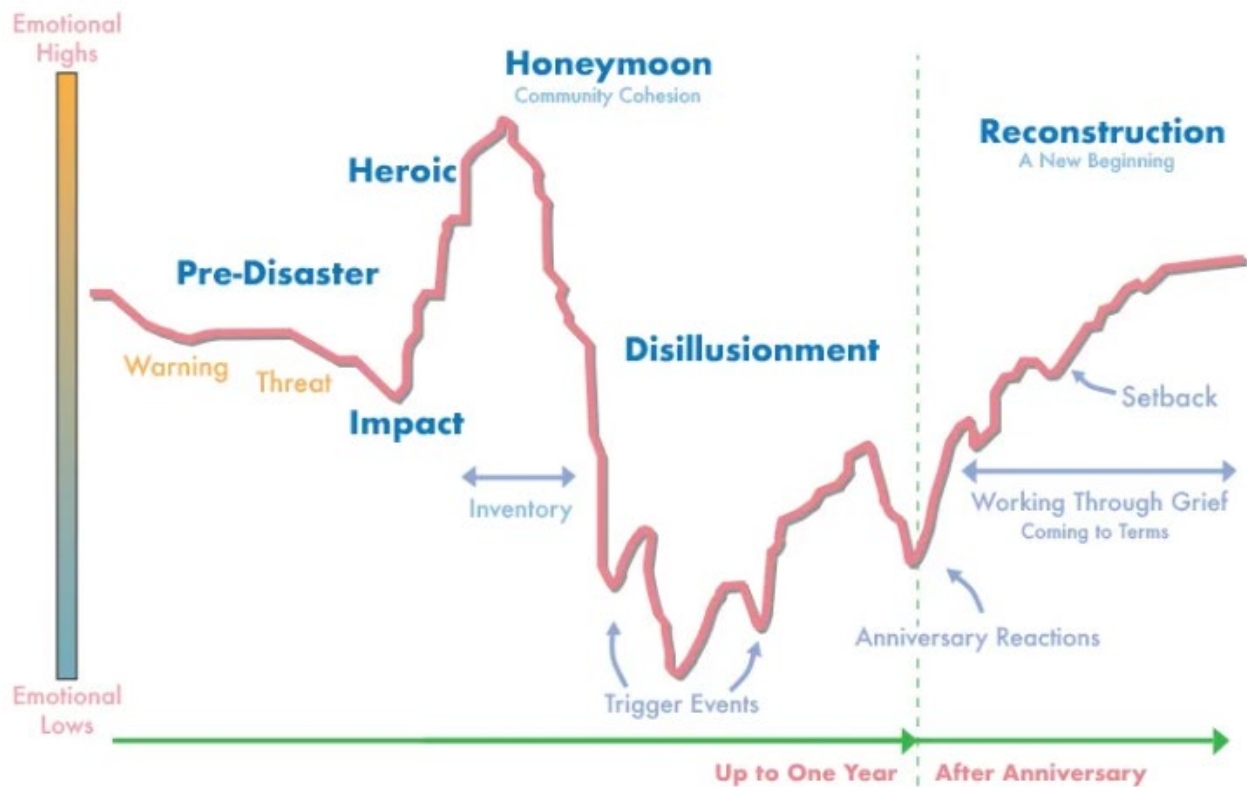
We discussed the concept of the use of Chaos as a Tactic – i.e. “flood the zone” with messaging that typically leverages uncertainty and fear. This is akin to the [Dead Cat Strategy](#) sometimes used in politics to divert attention away from a different agenda with something shocking. This appears to be what is happening with the current administration: flood the zone with shocking executive orders, create chaos, and sow fear, which in turn

diverts energies from positive, proactive, human (and environment)-centered initiatives and communications.

Core Considerations:

1. **Frame your assets in a positive light** – Create an alternative narrative that moves away from fear. Instead of talking solely about how your programs are fixing broken systems, reframe your assets to create narratives that illustrate how your efforts are creating a better world. (See <https://ssir.org/articles/entry/narrative-change-from-fixers-to-builders>.)
2. **Recognize our fear response and act regardless** – think about the intended and expected outcomes of different communications and program paths and keep moving forward.
3. **Pivot from being passive to proactive** – sitting on the sidelines allows other forces to take charge of the narrative. In the face of fear and confusion, take control of your narrative by reframing your assets to illustrate how your efforts benefit children, families, communities, countries, and the world. Consider illustrating how they benefit the United States either directly or indirectly.
4. **There is no right or wrong** – every brand has its own needs and considerations. Do what is right for your organization and the communities you serve. If you are unsure, consult your lawyers and/or policy experts.
5. **“Your digital footprint is forever”** – our internet technology has, for boon or bane, recorded our publications for decades. Your digital footprint is out there, and it is next to impossible to erase it. Accept this fact and move forward with your evolved narrative about how you are creating a better world.
6. **"Find your zone"** – Consider all the above and then choose the right communication approach (graphs, storytelling, digital content, media, channels) that keeps you moving forward with your goals.
7. **Find your community; be in community** – if you are not already engaged in community discussions (e.g. forums, town halls, chat rooms, etc.) find one to connect with and engage. If you cannot find one, create one. There are many tools that currently exist and many ways to enhance the tools you have to create these communities. The important thing is to be in community with like-minded colleagues to discuss challenges, solutions, concerns, and paths forward. It’s amazing how much direct, heartfelt conversations can put you at ease, not to mention what new partnerships and collaborations may come out of them.

8. **How we respond to fear:** see [Once upon a crisis – How stories help communities to find their way after disasters.](#)



Credit: The Good Apocalypse Guide

NARRATIVE STRATEGY: STABILITY

What you state to the world—your promises, your values, your commitments—are what people align with when they consider supporting your efforts, whether through donations, advocacy, volunteering, or other means of support. If you drastically change that narrative, you change the perception of your organization's efforts which creates questions about that alignment in your supporters.

Core Considerations:

- **Keep stability in messaging** – stability builds trust. You shape the perception of your organization. If you need to change your message, think about small, incremental shifts and how you can keep messaging around your core values stable and unwavering.

- **Consider the Consumerism Factor** – AndHumanity provided a study (linked below) showing that withdrawal from inclusive marketing and DEIA initiatives is actually a bad business decision - 70% of consumers state they would stop purchasing from a brand that backtracks on values they support.
 - o **Ref:** [Despite "anti-woke" climate, statistics prove consumers reward Inclusive Marketing - AndHumanity.](#)
- **Create your strategy** – stick to steady, data-backed approaches rather than reactionary messaging. When unsure about how and what to communicate, consult your community, your lawyers, and experts.
- **Focus on the future** – communicate about how your organization’s efforts are creating a better world. And recognize that society is becoming more globalized and diverse—long-term narratives should reflect this.
- **Recognize the “Visibility Gap”** – Competing narratives often align in goals but lack broad visibility; cite similarities to broaden the scale of your message.
- **Community Approach** – Align messaging with like-minded individuals and persist in consistent outreach. Avoid the trap of the narcissism of small differences – getting caught up in small differences instead of focusing on the bigger picture.
- **Fear: Recognize past and current trends** – fear-based narratives have dominated for over a year and have escalated since the new administration has taken office. History shows fear is what allows autocrats to take control of the narrative.



A diverse gathering of changemakers. Image: Gerd Altmann/Pixabay

KEY MESSAGING PRINCIPLES & FRAMING

Organizations directly impacted by federal funding cuts had significant concerns about what terminology is most appropriate in this new climate. We all agreed that we can still clearly talk about DEIA efforts without using the hot-button keywords raising concerns.

Reminder: Although the majority of the conversations throughout the session were focused on the alarm about DEIA programs and how to adjust communications, many of these principles apply across all nonprofit communications.

- **Unified Message:** “Better Together” came forth as a common unifying messaging theme. Highlighting collective progress illustrates the continued power of the effects of the whole industry of organizations and the importance of the sector while allowing space for your own stories of impact and positive change.

For more about how collective action with a unified message can create a tipping point for change, see **Narratives & Counter-Narratives**

(<https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/damon-centola-tipping-point-large-scale-social-change>). Research shows that major change occurs when ~25% of people shift perspectives.

- **Ref:** <https://www.exchangewire.com/blog/2025/02/20/consumers-shift-spend-to-align-with-values-nine-in-ten-shoppers-want-omnichannel-experiences-marketers-to-increase-budgets/>

<embed video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhY2y_43z8 >



- **Ensure strong representation** – “Queer,” “Gay,” “Trans,” etc. are all trigger words for the current administration. Consider talking about these programs with the following words and principles instead:
 - “Doing this works benefits everyone, including dominant cultures”
 - “Opportunities to provide fairness to all”
 - “Including all, solving problems together, provides better outcomes”
 - “Our programs ensure social justice is accessible to all and is not exclusionary”
 - "Merit free from favoritism or bias"
 - "Win-win for all"
 - "Healthier workplaces"
 - “Community members from diverse backgrounds”
 - “Patrons of various cultural identities”
 - “Racially and ethnically varied populations”

- **Asset framing** – focus more on aspirations than deficits. This is essential to create empathy and connection.
- **Bridge-building** – messaging should foster shared understanding rather than division. Talk more about similarities and being in common with fellow humans.
 - **Ref:** <https://andhumanity.co/insights/introducing-the-inclusion-continuum-a-brand-framework/>
- **Align messaging with current policy trends** – How can messaging emphasize strength, security, and economic growth while maintaining core values?
 - What exactly is America First? - illustrate not only how your efforts are improving conditions abroad, but are also benefiting Americans (economically, socially, etc.) and create collective message/messaging.
 - Do not reciprocally “flood the zone,” but respond with facts and critical analysis (even better with a ‘collective voice’ message).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Our conversation demonstrated that crises are not new. Past crises and extreme changes in government offer lessons that we can draw from. We are in a critical time in the history of nonprofit funding and program development and execution, and there is no going back to the previous paradigm.

GlobalWA looks forward to continuing these essential conversations and being in partnership and solidarity with our community.

Remember:

- ✓ Avoid reacting to fear-based narratives. Do not give into fear and chaos – think critically, consult your lawyers and experts.
- ✓ Evaluate where “asset framing” can help to highlight strengths and use language that paints the picture of a better future rather than language about fixing what’s broken.
- ✓ Consider a coordinated messaging approach across global development organizations.
- ✓ Reframe DEIA communication using language that resonates with broader audiences.
- ✓ Re-evaluate messaging priorities based on shifting policy trends and advocacy opportunities.



Discussing issues together at the GlobalWA Goalmakers conference. Photo: John Vicory

RESOURCES & FURTHER READING

- [From Fixers to Builders](#) (Stanford Social Innovation Review re: Next Narratives and Asset Framing)
- [Statistics Prove Consumers Reward Inclusive Marketing](#) (AndHumanity)
- [Inclusion Brand Framework](#) (AndHumanity)
- [How Values Can Bring People Together](#) (Stronger Stories)
- [Once Upon a Crisis](#) (Blog on Homeland Security Crisis Curve)
- [Lean Story School](#) (Stronger Stories)
- [The Features of Narratives](#) (Frameworks Institute)
- [Inclusive Marketing and Communications in 2025 | “What Does This All Mean?” - AndHumanity](#)