



# **Amplifying Your Foundation's Impact Through Storytelling & Strategic Messaging**

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# Agenda

- Introduction
- Reframing “Storytelling”
- Where Everyday Stories Live & How to Capture Them
- From Moments to Use: Where These Stories Go
- The Foundation’s Dilemma: It’s Not Our Story to Tell
- Building Relationships with Reporters & Pitching Stories
- Risk Management
- Closing Challenge



# Introduction



## Red Cross President Resigns; Questions Remain



ABC

## ABC's Ross, Sauer, Esposito Receive Polk Award For Report On CIA Prisons

FEBRUARY 21, 2006



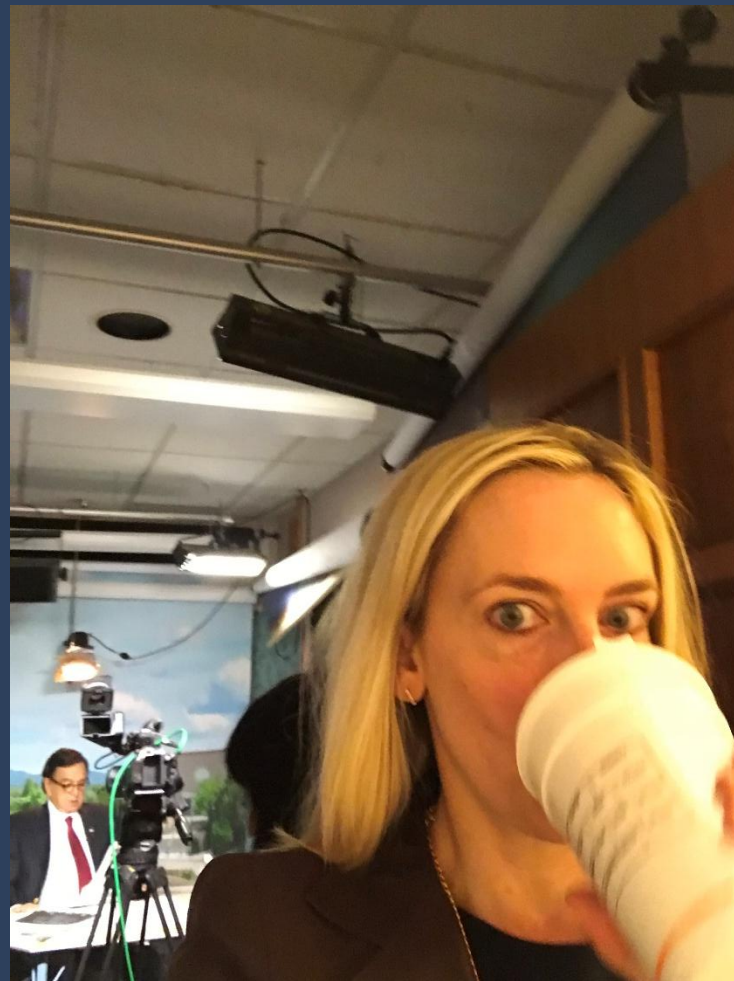
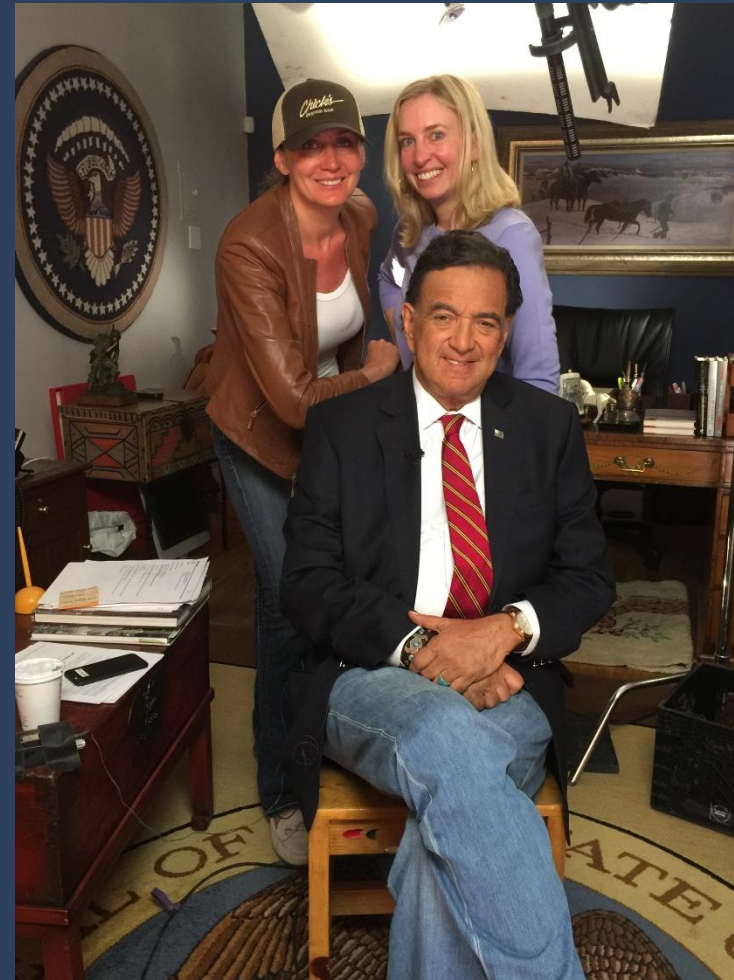
## Lawmaker Quits Over Messages Sent to Teenage Pages



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ce

## ABC Racking Up Awards For Foley Scoop

MARCH 27, 2007





# Reframing “Storytelling”

# The Myth of Storytelling

## People think storytelling is:

- Writing polished narratives
- With a beginning, middle, and end
- Time consuming



# This Breaks Down at Foundations

## Our work is:

- Ongoing
- Incremental
- Takes years to see outcomes



# Redefining Storytelling at Foundations

## Storytelling is not:

- A single's hero's journey
- A glossy success story
- A once-a-year impact report
- Something only your Comms person does



# Storytelling for Foundations

## Redefined as:

- Using human, relatable language
- Making work visible to outsiders
- Showing progress, not just outcomes
- Repeating what matters, clearly & consistently





# Where Everyday Stories Live & How to Capture Them

# Your Stories Are All Around You



## Storytelling shows up in:

- Conversations with teammates & partners
- Site visits & convenings
- Small wins, learning moments, & setbacks



Anchorage  
Health Foundation

# Why These Moments Matter



- They build trust
- They make your work relatable & understandable
- They're easy to repeat & share

**Reframe:** Don't ask "is this a "perfect story?"  
Ask "is this clear, human, & true?"

# Simple Systems to Capture These Moments



**Create a low-bar, shared place to collect moments, such as a Slack channel or folder. Invite teammates to drop in:**

- Photos from site visits
- A sentence or two after a meeting
- A quote they heard that stuck with them
- A quick note about something that surprised them

# Examples of Story Moments



- A photo from a site visit: *“First time the new space is being used!”*
- A quick Slack message: *“Today, three partners met to troubleshoot this together.”*
- A sentence from a meeting: *“We’re not there yet, but this is the first time this feels possible.”*

# Try This: A Simple Exercise



## Start capturing everyday story moments:

- Create your shared place to collect moments
- Send a simple ask to your team:  
*If something happens that feels like progress, learning, or connection, drop one sentence or a photo here. There's no wrong entry. If you're not sure if it belongs, it probably does.*



# From Moments to Use: Stories Become Strategic Messaging



# Make Messaging Tangible & Useable



## **Messaging is not:**

- Slogans
- Branding
- Website Overhauls

**Messaging is how your work gets explained in small, repeatable ways.**

# Where These Moments Get Used



- Newsletters
- Board Updates
- Social Media
- Presentations & Convenings
- Media Background

# Same Moment, Different Uses

## Example #1: A Small Win



First funding received today after two years  
of planning!

### This moment can become:

- Newsletter line: *“This month, a community-led project received its first funding after years of planning.”*
- Social post: *“Every project starts somewhere. This was the first yes.”*
- Board update: *“This funding has unlocked steps that weren’t possible before.”*

# Same Moment, Different Uses

## Example #2: The Setback



The affordable housing site is ready, but city permitting is slowing the process!

### This setback can become:

- Newsletter line: *“This project is ready to move forward and is facing slow permitting approval. Our role has been to bring partners together and keep communication moving so it doesn’t stall.”*
- Social post: *“Progress isn’t always visible. Sometimes it’s simply staying at the table.”*
- Board update: *“This project is shovel ready but delayed by permitting. We’re actively convening partners to maintain momentum and alignment.”*



# The Foundation's Dilemma: It's Not Our Story to Tell

# Storytelling Challenges Foundations Face



If we're not the hero or the main character, what is our role?

Instead of centering the Foundation as the hero, center the function.

# 1. The Convener: We bring unlikely partners to the same table.

## Language Examples:

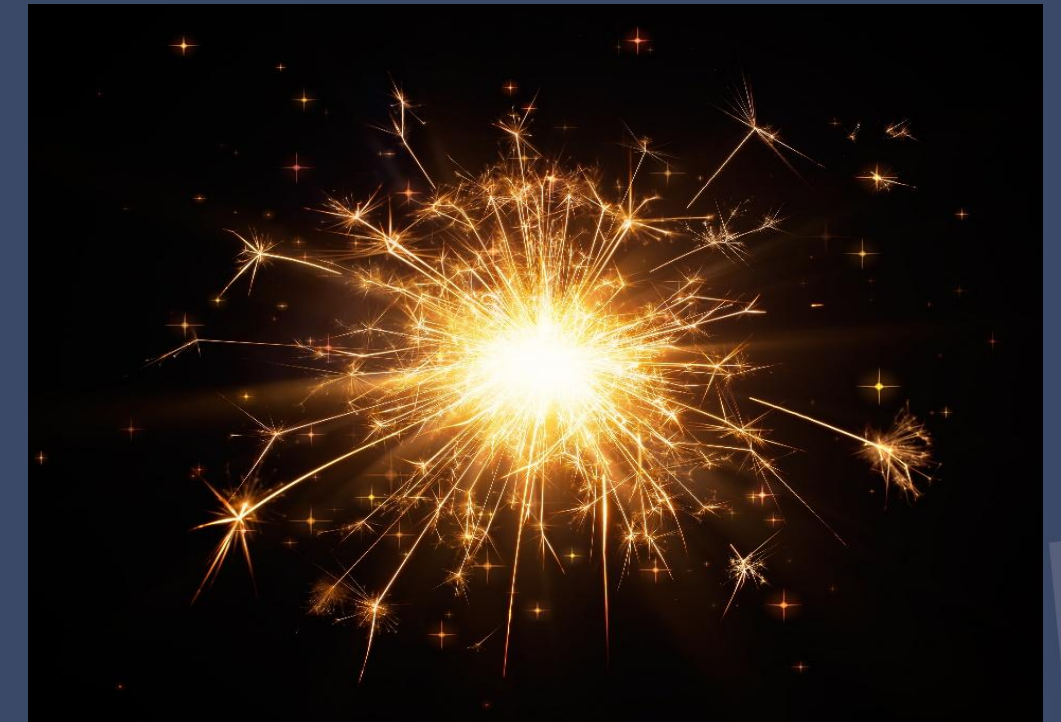
- *“We brought city officials, providers, and funders together to align on next steps.”*
- *“Our role was to keep the conversation moving when momentum stalled.”*
- *“We created space for collaboration that hadn’t existed before.”*



# 2. The Catalyst: We help move something from idea to action.

## Language Examples:

- *“This was the first funding that allowed the project to move forward.”*
- *“Our early investment helped unlock additional capital.”*
- *“We took early risk so others could step in.”*



# 3. The Risk Taker: Foundations can fund things others can't

## Language Examples:

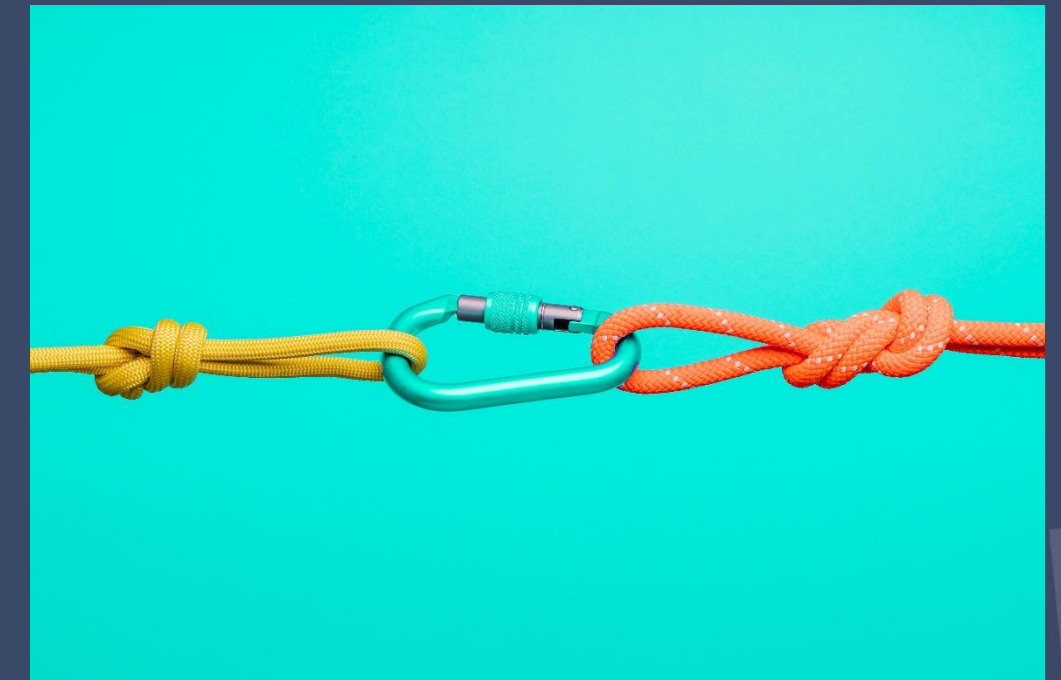
- *“We supported a pilot when there wasn't yet public funding.”*
- *“We funded planning work before the project was shovel ready.”*
- *“We tested an approach before scale.”*



# 4. The Steward: Sometimes the role isn't flashy. It's stabilizing.

## Language Examples:

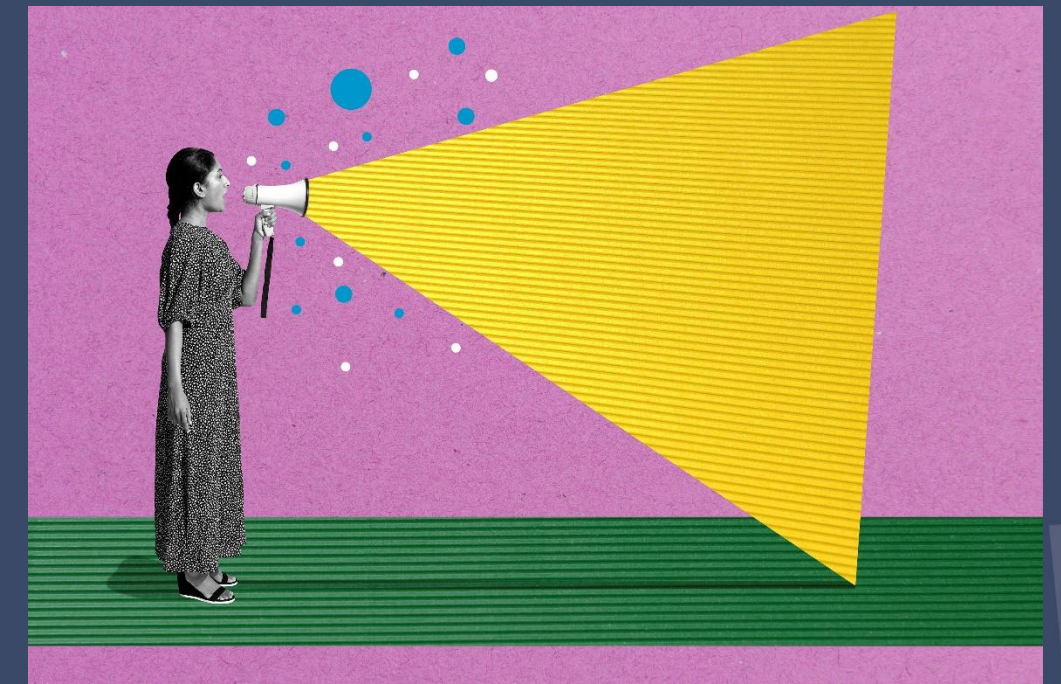
1. *"We provided bridge funding during a cash flow gap."*
2. *"We helped sustain services during uncertainty."*
3. *"We ensured work didn't stall."*



# 5. The Amplifier: You don't have to own a story to elevate it.

## Language Examples:

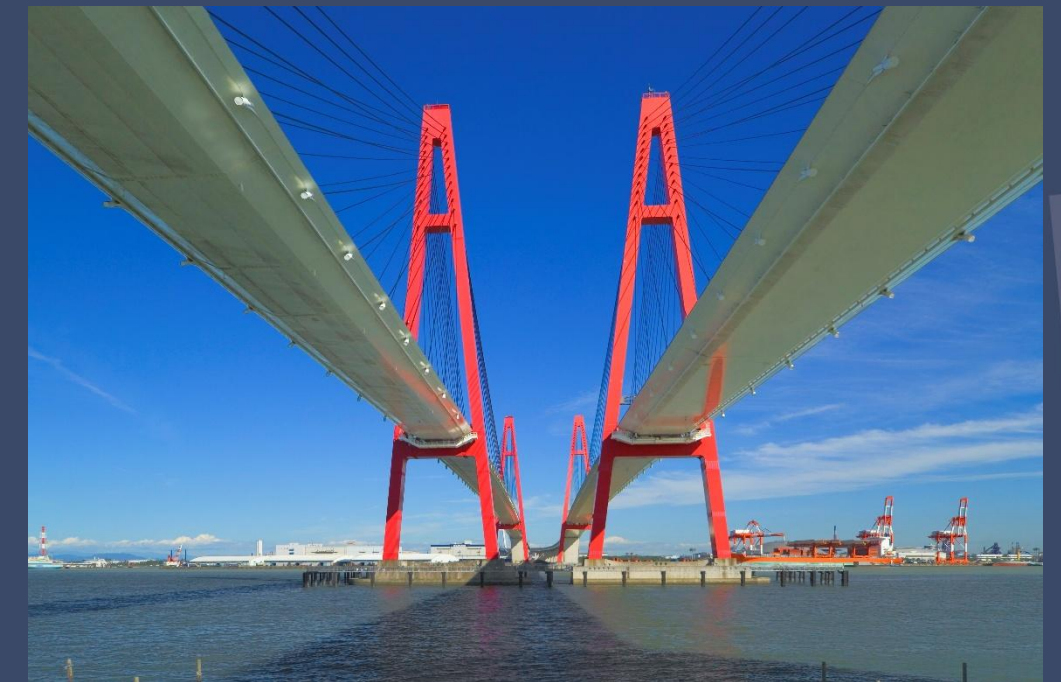
- *"We're proud to support partners doing this work."*
- *"Our role is to help make this work visible."*
- *"We connected this project to policymakers and media."*



# 6. The Bridge Builder: Foundations often sit between community, government, and the private sector

## Language Examples:

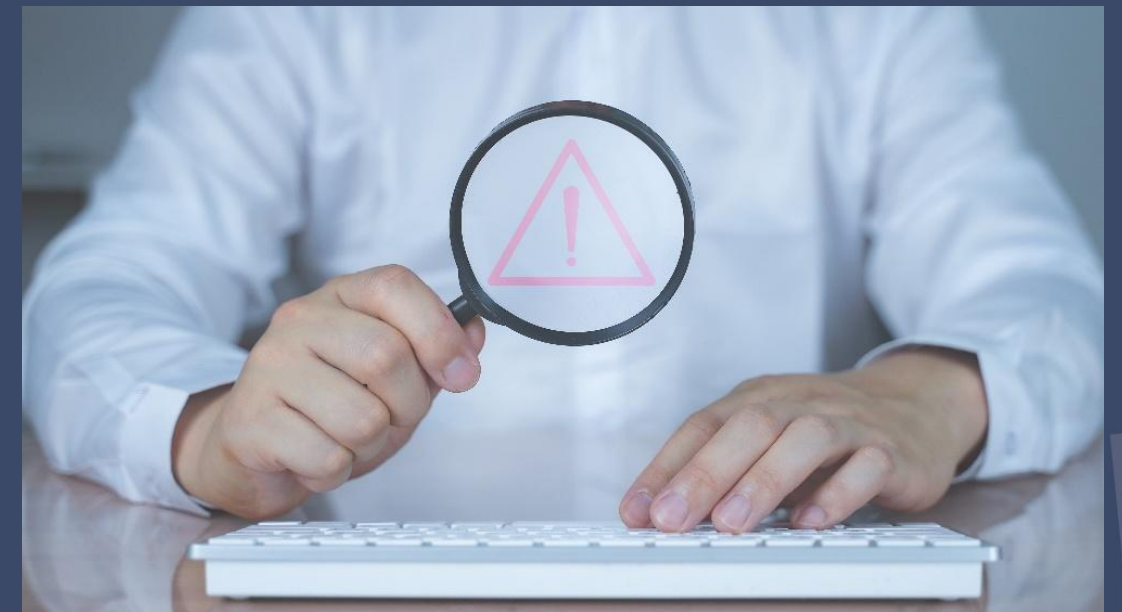
- *“We translate community needs into investable strategies.”*
- *“We help policymakers understand what’s happening on the ground.”*
- *“We connect lived experience to funding decisions.”*



# Foundations may not be the hero, but we're part of the plot

## Because if you don't explain your role:

- People assume you just write checks
- Or they assume you're unnecessary
- Or they assume you're controlling





# Building Relationships with Reporters & Pitching Stories

# Media Relationships



## Reaching out:

- Find the right reporter.
- Introduce yourself.
- Introduce your experts.

# Media Relationships



## Use a News Peg:

- Tie your issues to current events.
- Offer experts or voices.

# Media Relationships



## **Pitch a Story (the right way):**

- Bring a story, not just an issue.
- Suggest interviewees.

# Media Relationships




## Dangle an Exclusive:

- Offer early access to major news.
- Use embargo agreements.

# SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN

Report: More N.M. kids raised in kinship care, despite decreases nationally

★ Follow Margaret O'Hara

By Margaret O'Hara mohara@sfnewmexican.com  
Jan 10, 2024 Updated Feb 13, 2025  2



Vickie Luviano plays with her 5-year-old grandson, Ezra Luviano, in June at their Española home. Vickie has been raising her grandson on her own, living off Social Security and disability income, since her son was incarcerated.

Jim Weber/The New Mexican

Anchorum Health Foundation unveils plan to pump \$25M to Northern N.M. community foundations

★ Follow Gabrielle Porter

By Gabrielle Porter gporter@sfnewmexican.com  
Jul 15, 2024 Updated Aug 20, 2025  2



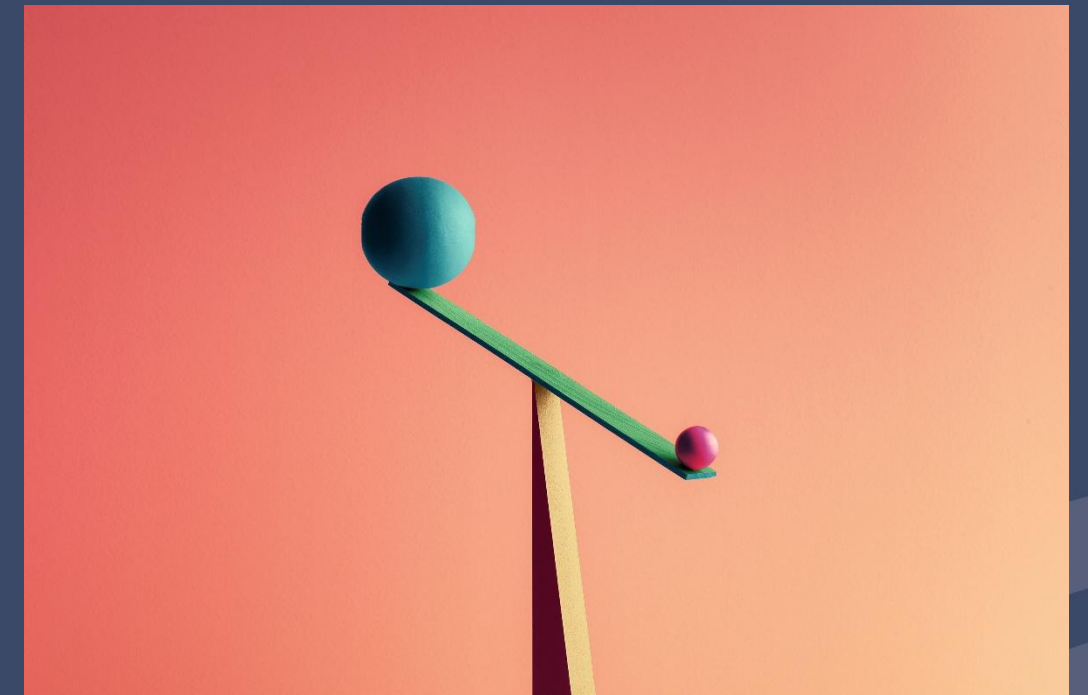


# This Isn't Just Communications. It's Risk Management

# Every Organization Is Managing Risk

- Financial
- Legal
- Operational
- Reputational

Communications touches all of them.



# Foundations Have Unique Risk Exposure

- We move significant dollars
- We influence systems
- We are not elected
- We are not the ones delivering services



This creates ambiguity.

# When Your Role Isn't Clear

- People assume control
- Or they assume secret funding or special interests
- Or they assume a political agenda
- Or they assume self-interest



# In Every Story, Name Your Role

- Where did you enter?
- What risk did you absorb?
- What gap did you fill?
- What decision did you influence?



# Don't Let Your Role Be the Best-Kept Secret

- When you fund something, say why
- When you convene, say what you're trying to unlock
- When you step back, say that too
- When something works, connect the dots

**Explaining your role is not self-promotion.  
It's accountability.**



# Closing Challenge

Create one place where your team can drop one photo and/or sentence when something meaningful happens.

**That's it.**





Feel free to reach out!

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# Thank You.

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[anchorum.org](https://www.anchorum.org)