Our Stories, Our Strength: Harnessing Narrative for Community Impact
Endow Manitoba: 2026 Community Foundation Conference

Why Stories Matter: Stories shape how we understand identity, difference, and community. Through names, food, memory, and dialogue, we carry histories—spoken and unspoken—that influence how we gather and belong. When organizations intentionally engage storytelling, they can foster empathy, trust, and collective care.

Key Takeaways:

1. Brave Spaces Build Growth
Brave spaces are relational spaces where people feel respected enough to speak honestly—even when conversations feel difficult.

- Safety does not mean agreement
- Discomfort can support learning
- Curiosity builds connection

True dialogue happens when people are safe, but not always comfortable.

2. Names Carry Power and History
Names are deeply connected to culture, identity, and lived experience.

- How names are spoken reflects whose identities are valued
- Pressures to change or simplify names can erase connection and belonging
- Honouring names is an act of respect and inclusion

3. Food Holds Memory, Culture and Care
Food carries *nefas*, the breath of home.

- Recipes tell stories of migration, resilience, joy, and loss
- Shared meals can open space for storytelling and understanding

4. Question the "Other"
Othering creates distance and simplifies complex human stories.

- Everyone holds strengths and values shaped by experience
- Listening deeply can reveal shared values across difference
- Empathy begins with curiosity

Organizational Reflection Checklist

Consider using this checklist when planning gatherings, meetings, or community activities:

Creating Brave Spaces

☐ Do we communicate expectations for respectful, courageous dialogue?
☐ Are multiple truths welcomed without pressure for agreement?
☐ Do facilitators model listening and humility?

Honouring Story and Identity

☐ Are people invited to share stories on their own terms?
☐ Are names, identities, and experiences consistently respected?
☐ Do we avoid extracting stories without care or consent?

Using Food With Intention

☐ Is food used to build connection, not just as hospitality?
☐ Are cultural meanings of food acknowledged and respected?
☐ Are community members involved in how food experiences are shaped?

Avoiding Harm

☐ Have we considered power, representation, and appropriation?
☐ Do participants feel recognized rather than tokenized?

From Reflection to Action

☐ What is one practice we can take back to our organization?
☐ How will we continue these conversations beyond this event?

A Question to Carry Forward

How can the ways we gather, around tables, in fields, and in boardrooms, become acts of care that strengthen belonging and shared responsibility?