



# Embedding Equity in Your Communications

Jordan Duckens, Communications Officer

# This or That?

Pen

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Pencil

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OR



# Would you rather...

Write

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OR

Copyedit Someone's  
Writing

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It's ok to use emojis in work emails.

Yes

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OR

No

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# KZCF Equity Journey

Word  
Choice



Narratives



Frameworks



# DEI Checklist

# Ask Yourself...

- ▣ Are the examples you use reinforcing stereotypes?
- ▣ Is the language you use reinforcing gender binaries, such as using “he or she” when you could just use “they”?
- ▣ Are you reinforcing stigma against poor people, such as calling something “low-class”?
- ▣ Are you casually using words like “tribe” and “spirit animal” that may have significant meaning to Native and other communities?
- ▣ Are you making light of medical conditions such as alcoholism?
- ▣ Are you using words that are ableist, like “tone-deaf”?
- ▣ Are you using language that further stigmatizes mental health, such as “crazy”?





# Systems vs. Individual Narratives

# What's the difference?

## Individual

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- ▣ Narrow context
- ▣ missing nuance
- ▣ Perpetuates harmful narrative that "if they did it, you can too."

## Systems

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- ▣ Board context
- ▣ Tells more complete, nuanced story
- ▣ Connects dots between individual outcomes and history, policies and systems structures



# Asset Framing

# Asset-framing People Stories

## SCHOLARSHIP:

### Expanding the definition of excellence

In 2019, the Kalamazoo Community Foundation (KZCF) Scholarship team explored how to remove barriers for local high school students looking to further their education and reach full potential. The team took on the challenge of re-evaluating the requirements and application scoring measures for one of our biggest scholarships – The Clarence L. RemyNSE Scholarship.

“The goal of our program is to help students – especially students with fewer resources – make their college goals a reality,” said **Laura Galaviz**, scholarship officer at KZCF. “Unfortunately, a lot of our evaluation tools were not necessarily set up to identify students who showed the drive, ability and potential for success in higher ed, but more so to reward students who had risen to the top of their classes in high school.”

RemyNSE Scholarship recipients can receive a \$7,500 maximum award that can be renewed for up to three years, making it the largest scholarship offered at KZCF.

“The RemyNSE is our largest scholarship both in number of recipients and award amount. It seemed to make sense that starting with that scholarship would help us see how much of an impact we could make by expanding our thinking around excellence,” Galaviz said.

#### “Don’t lower the bar, lower the barriers”

The team’s new approach was inspired by Nadira Foley’s book, “A Radical Plan to Combat Inequality in College Admissions.” She challenges institutions to use resources to cultivate the best students as

opposed to simply *finding* them. Through research, school visits and interviews with teachers and counselors, the team identified common barriers in traditional scholarship requirements: transportation and limited home resources, school curriculum and activity offerings.

Lack of access to transportation limits participation in extracurricular activities, volunteer opportunities, SAT prep or tutoring. Limited financial resources blocks students from participating in these activities, especially if they act as a caregiver for a younger sibling or help support their family with a part-time job. Barriers are also created when schools are not able to offer a variety of extracurricular activities and Advanced Placement classes.

**“When we have a very traditional view of what excellence is, we inadvertently reinforce and even widen the achievement and wealth gap.”**

**Laura Galaviz, Scholarship Officer  
Kalamazoo Community Foundation**



With these barriers in mind, the RemyNSE application scoring measures were revised to include criteria such as perseverance, growth, initiative, character and impact. Now, scoring does not factor in standardized testing. Extracurricular activity scoring takes into consideration work experience during the academic year, student impact and demonstrated performance improvement. The essay prompt also reflects this newly adopted criteria.



*RemyNSE Scholarship recipient Jztrellle Abella is a graduate of Comstock High School. She’s currently in her first year at Kalamazoo College studying Pre-Law.*

Galaviz emphasized the changes aren’t meant to exclude students who have traditionally done well in RemyNSE scoring. The goal is to create a more inclusive understanding of what it means to excel as a student. “When we have a very traditional view of what excellence is, we inadvertently reinforce and even widen the achievement and wealth gap,” Galaviz said.

“I wanted to look at scholarships more holistically, not solely as a reward for a great GPA and a lot of activities – which are admirable achievements, but not the only determinant of post-high school success,” Galaviz said. “This was a way of increasing equity by supporting students who could clearly succeed in college, but perhaps encountered barriers in their K-12 journey.”

#### Impact of equity

The results were encouraging, with an improved diversity of applicants. Of the top 35 applicants, 37% identified as people of color, up from 19% in 2018.

Aside from scoring, the team also re-evaluated how they were informing students about scholarship opportunities. A change in outreach strategy led to

increased applicant representation from previously underrepresented school districts in the county. And after 10 years of the scholarship only being open to graduating high school seniors, RemyNSE was extended to first-year college students in 2019. Without that change, local college students like Jztrellle Abella would have been excluded.

#### Reimagining excellence

**Jztrellle Abella**, a first-year Pre-Law student at Kalamazoo College, is one of this year’s RemyNSE recipients and among the top 10 highest scoring applicants.

She knew the RemyNSE scholarship was an opportunity to help her reach her dreams of pursuing law or nonprofit work. Abella, who was born in the Philippines and grew up in Kalamazoo, wants to use her multi-cultural background to help others and improve representation in the field of law.

“You don’t see many people of color in law,” said Abella. “And I think being bilingual will give me an opportunity to help more people.”

She is proud of everything she was able to achieve as a high school student, including graduating *summa cum laude* from Comstock High School. She even held a full-time job during the school year, while friends and family helped her along the way.

“My friends definitely played a role in my success. I was surrounded by like-minded people who encouraged me and helped me to always do my best,” Abella said. “And my mom of course. She was my biggest supporter.”

Because Abella’s mother did not attend American schools like she did, there were some challenges when it came to navigating the education system. “My mom, just being present and making sure I had what I needed, was a big support,” Abella said.

# Asset-framing People Stories

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*“My friends definitely played a role in my success. I was surrounded by like-minded people who encouraged me and helped me to always do my best. And my mom of course. She was my biggest supporter.”*

*She was born in the Philippines and grew up in Kalamazoo, wants to use her multi-cultural background to help others and improve representation in the field of law.*



# Asset Framing Our Story





themselves up by their own bootstraps. Everybody doesn't have boots. Everybody doesn't have straps



# VPSA Framework



**Value:** What do most of us care about?



**Problem:** What threatens what we care about?



**Solution:** How can we remove this threat ?



**Action:** How can I support the solution?

# VPSA in Community Stories



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# Top Five Takeaways (+1)

1. Language and narratives are POWERFUL.
2. Language is not neutral or objective.
3. You'll do more **unlearning old** than **learning new**.
4. How we communicate is fluid and always evolving.
5. Look to a new authority on language.
6. Make space for conversation.



Questions / Discussion