



# Building a Compelling Cycling Narrative

How to inspire more people to see the  
benefits of cycling-friendly spaces

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# Why Do We Need A Compelling Narrative?

- ❖ Live in an era where how people **feel** has a strong influence on behaviour.
- ❖ Narratives about cycling as the **greener** and **physically healthier** option don't always resonate.
- ❖ Misinformation and/or misunderstanding has created **polarized** views on investments in cycling.
- ❖ Existing images of and text about “cyclists” **don't reflect** the people we are trying to reach.







# Ingredients for a Compelling Narrative

## WHO

- ❖ Our narratives needs to reflect the complex and varied people in our communities.

## WHY

- ❖ What do we need the community to understand to build understanding and inspire behaviour change?

## HOW

- ❖ With so many tools in our toolbox, which communications methods will be the most effective?

# First Ingredient: Who

Building a reflective foundation  
for our narrative



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# Cycling as a tool for autonomous, resilient and happy kids

- ❖ Investment in cycling enables safe, independent childhood travel
  - ❖ Supports Safe Routes to School programs
  - ❖ Children and teens feel empowered to spend more time outside
  - ❖ Allows for the development of vital risk-assessment skills
  - ❖ Gives older children and teens freedom
  - ❖ Parents and caregivers gain valuable time

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# Cycling without age: Improving mobility for older adults

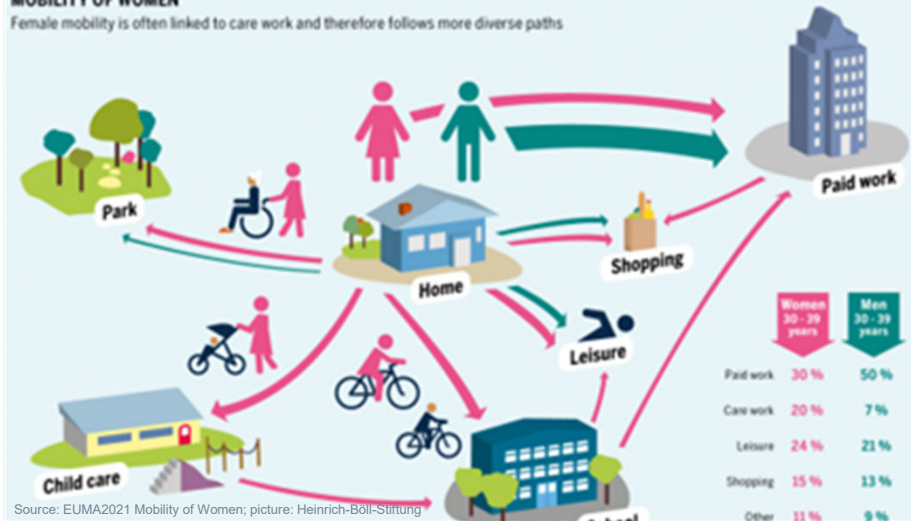
- ❖ When driving becomes not an option, cycling can be a mobility tool for freedom
- ❖ Allows older adults to maintain social connection to community
- ❖ Investments can support:
  - ❖ Walkable and cyclable neighbourhoods
  - ❖ The creation of relaxed cycling routes
- ❖ Adapted and electric mobility extends ability and endurance





#### MOBILITY OF WOMEN

Female mobility is often linked to care work and therefore follows more diverse paths



Source: EUMA2021 Mobility of Women; picture: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung

# Supporting mobilities of care: Cycling is for more than just commuting

- ❖ Cycling can support care trips and trip chaining
  - ❖ Makes short trips and frequent stops easier
  - ❖ Shows how trips to shops, school, etc., can be done in another way
- ❖ Cycling networks connecting care trip generators expands safe network for all users
  - ❖ Cycle lanes can make caregivers' lives easier



# Women and Cycling: Social safety and freedom

- ❖ Fear of violence influences women's mobility choices
- ❖ Women's involvement helps shift priorities
- ❖ Safe and connected cycling - with good lighting, secure cycle parking, and connected to key locations - improves visibility and perceptions of safety
- ❖ Seeing more women cycling improves perceptions, and encourages more women to try





# Cycling from disabling to enabling environments

- ❖ We are all on a scale from well to unwell – key is to maintain autonomy
- ❖ Requires a combination of active and reliable public transport
- ❖ “Cycling” isn’t always about two wheels
- ❖ Smooth, separated cycling infrastructure enables other wheeled trips
  - ❖ Mobility scooters, tricycles, adapted wheelchairs...



# Remind people already cycling why they love it

- ❖ Even long-time cyclists need reminding of the joy and benefits
- ❖ Sometimes they've been advocating for so long they overlook their own benefits
- ❖ Investments are for them as well
  - ❖ Supporting current habits
  - ❖ Building a legacy for their future



# Second Ingredient: Why

What does your vision / plan /  
design mean for the community



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# Cycling our way to better access to opportunity

- ❖ Multi-modal transport networks give people choice
- ❖ Dutch context:
  - ❖ 81% of the population lives within 7.5 km of a train station
  - ❖ 50% of all train journeys start with a cycle ride
- ❖ Access possible through linking walking, cycling, public transport networks to essential services





# (Re)shaping spaces for enjoyment through active travel

- ❖ Reduced traffic restores public space for social engagement
- ❖ Increases level of trust and desire to care for the space
- ❖ Traffic noise replaced by sounds of life
- ❖ Increases feelings of social safety - EYES ON THE STREET



# Cycling (and walking) helps local businesses thrive

- ❖ Increased foot and cycle traffic brings net positive to local businesses
  - ❖ Lower per trip spend but more frequent visits
- ❖ Reduced traffic stress inspires people to come and spend time (and money)
- ❖ Reduced parking requirements open space for outdoor retail / restaurants





# Cycling (and walking) helps everyone thrive

- ❖ More active travel for improved overall health
  - ❖ Fewer sick days and more energized
  - ❖ Improved mental health
- ❖ Inspires feelings of being part of the community
- ❖ Better access to restorative spaces

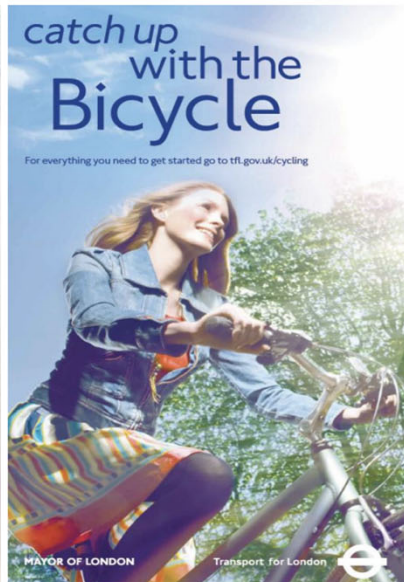
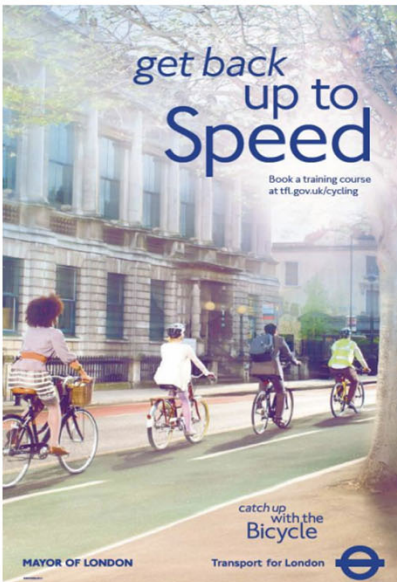
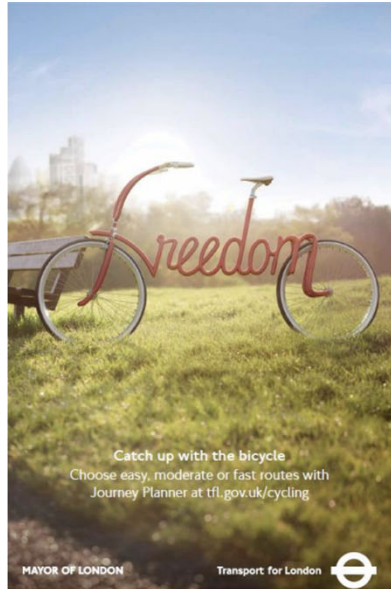
# Third Ingredient: How

Effective communications tools  
to build consensus



Photo: Baome  
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# Have a clear communications strategy

- ❖ Coordinate closely with your communications department
- ❖ Set clear goals and measurements
- ❖ Have a defined tone for your audience (see the 'WHO')
- ❖ Ensure efforts are coordinated across teams

❖ Avoid miscommunication by removing silos -  
We are all one team working together!

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# Execute the strategy: Engagement events

- ❖ Be creative! Go beyond the usual community information night
  - ❖ Open streets events
  - ❖ Public dance events / live music / film screenings / local storytellers...
  - ❖ Focus groups / small group discussions
- ❖ Engage with **ALL** of the community - kids, seniors, etc.
  - ❖ Open workshops where the community gets to co-create the solution



# Festival to celebrate and explore travel

20 March 2025

Share Save

Chloe Hughes  
BBC News, West Midlands



The four-day festival has something for everyone, said Seb Slater from Shrewsbury BID

A four-day festival will explore and celebrate the future of travel in a Shropshire town.

The Shrewsbury Moves Festival has been organised by the town's Business Improvement District (BID), Shropshire Council and Shrewsbury Town Council.

The event, from Thursday to Sunday, includes conferences and talks about travel with community leaders, businesses and health professionals.

Activities will also be held in The Square such as yoga classes, skipping and a Tai Chi performance.

## Execute the strategy: Deliberate media coverage

- ❖ If you don't control the narrative, someone else will
- ❖ Develop targeted press releases with project information
- ❖ Foster relationships with local journalists to avoid misinformation
- ❖ Have a schedule that follows key project milestones



## Execute the strategy: Create a compelling campaign

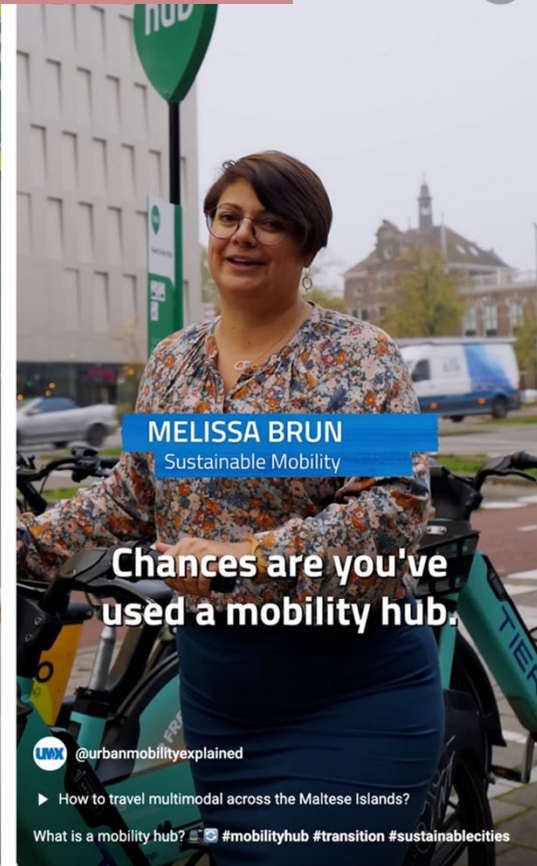
- ❖ Make use of all of the tools in your communications toolbox:
  - ❖ Website for up-to-date information (and make sure it stays updated)
  - ❖ Social media (Go to the mediums all your audiences use)
  - ❖ Share aspirational and informational photos and videos
- ❖ Be aspirational - We can be what we can't see!

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# Video Campaign Example 1:

Communicate a lot in just a little



EIT Urban Mobility Explain News Shorts (2024)

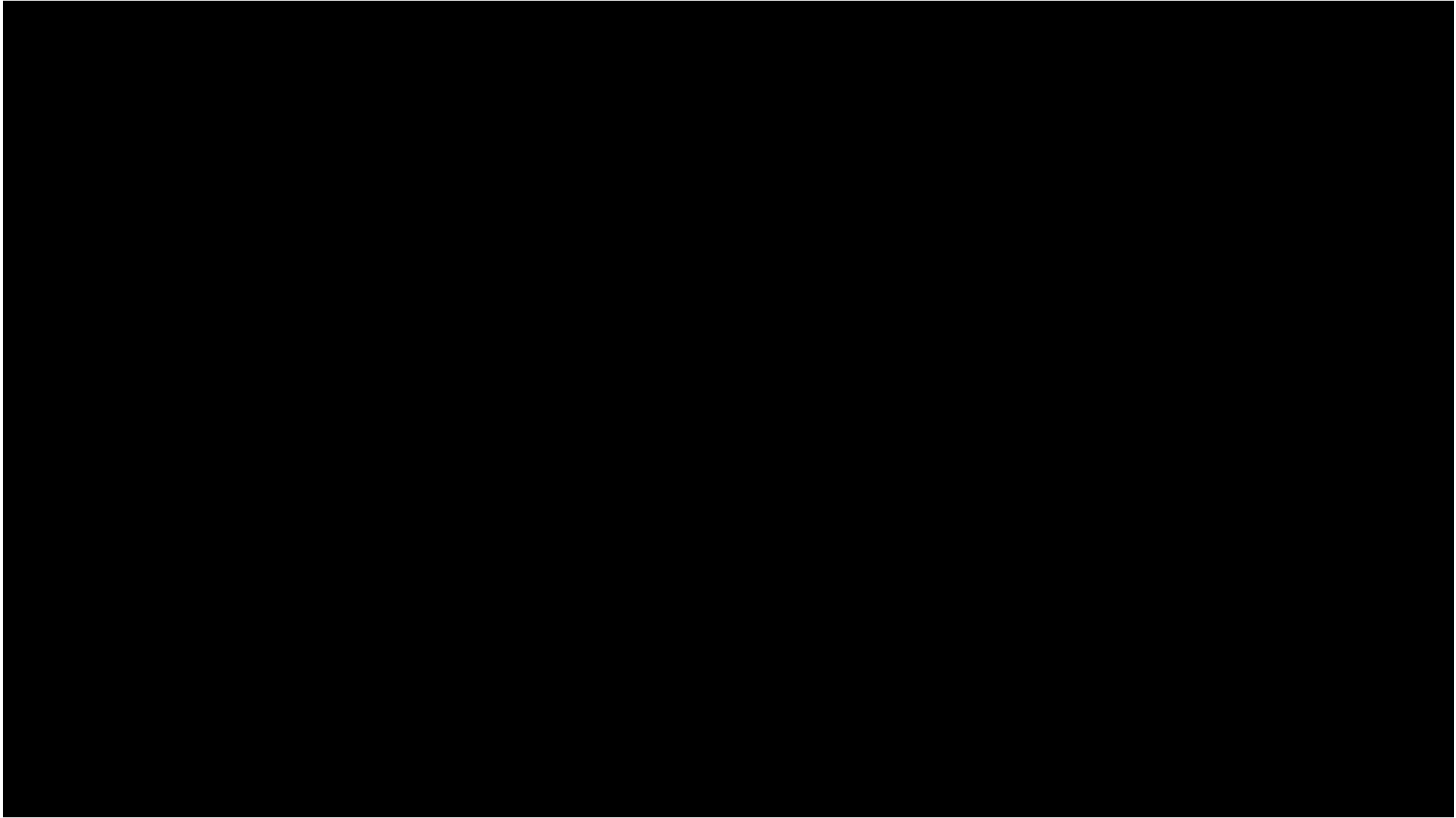




## Video Campaign Example 2:

Share and celebrate local success stories



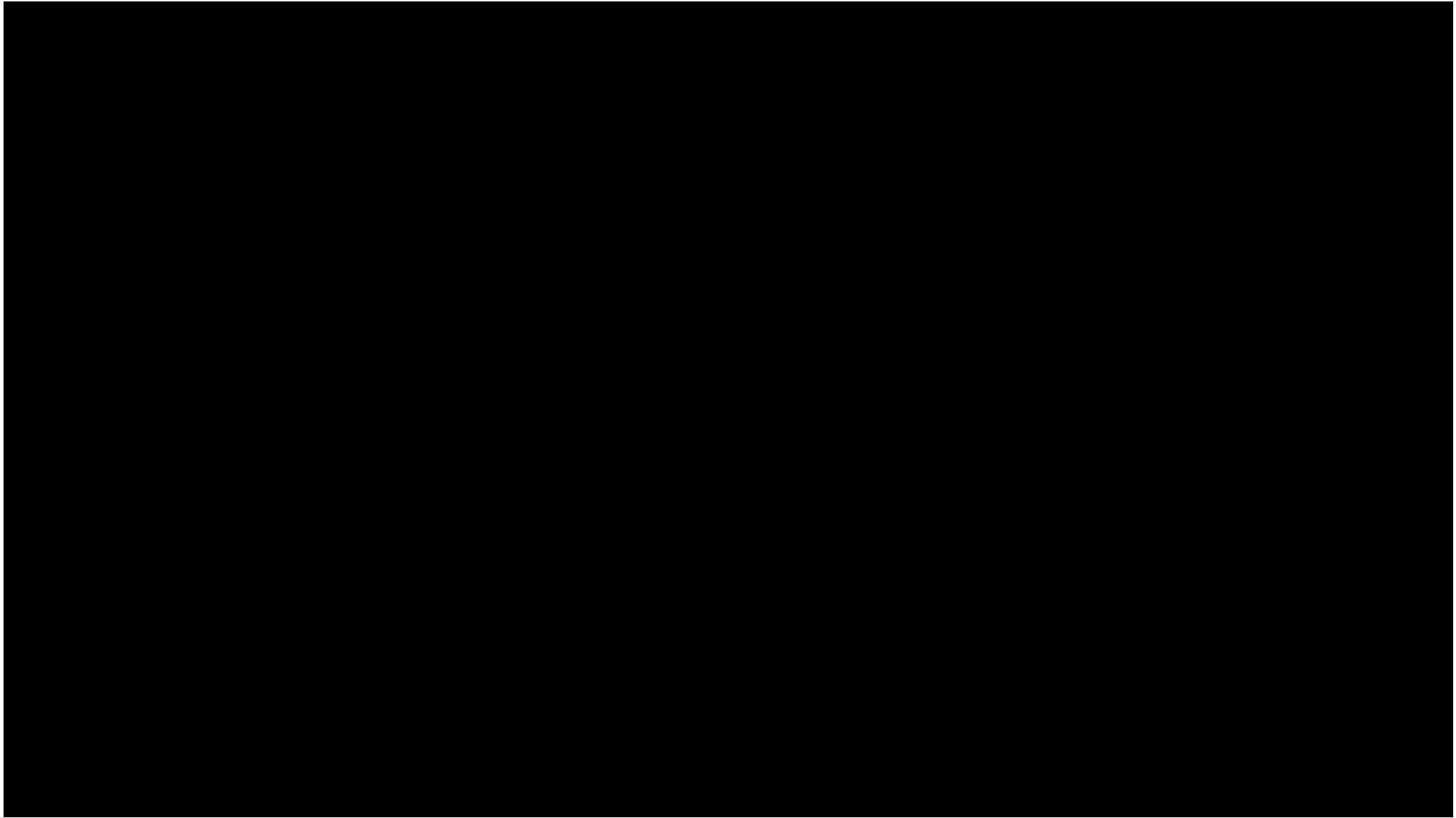




# Video Campaign Example 3:

City-led messaging









Creating successful narratives help you achieve your goals for happy, healthy communities.



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# Thanks!



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