NIA Scorecard™

Evaluating Narratives, Belonging, and Invisible Boundaries

Introduction

The NIA Scorecard is a structured assessment tool designed to support municipalities, organisations, institutions, and development initiatives.

The purpose of the Scorecard is not to evaluate whether a project is successful or unsuccessful.

Its purpose is to evaluate how narratives shape experiences of belonging, visibility, legitimacy, and future possibilities.

The framework builds on the principles of Narrative Impact Assessment (NIA) and provides a systematic approach for identifying narrative strengths, vulnerabilities, and unintended consequences.

The Scorecard can be used during planning, implementation, evaluation, or review processes.

The Five Dimensions

The NIA Scorecard evaluates five dimensions:

1. Belonging
2. Dignity
3. Future
4. Narrative Boundaries
5. Legitimacy

Each dimension is assessed on a scale from 1 to 5.

Scoring Scale

Score	Description
1	Very Weak
2	Weak
3	Moderate
4	Strong

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Score	Description
5	Very Strong

Dimension 1

Belonging

Belonging concerns whether people can recognise themselves within the initiative and whether they feel included in the future being described.

Assessment Questions

Are diverse groups represented?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Can people recognise themselves in the initiative?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Does the initiative strengthen connection to place and community?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Belonging Score

_____ / 15

Dimension 2

Dignity

Dignity concerns how people and places are described.

Communities should not be defined solely through deficits, problems, or vulnerabilities.

Assessment Questions

Are local strengths recognised?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

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Does the initiative avoid deficit-based language?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Does communication promote respect and legitimacy?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Dignity Score

_____ / 15

Dimension 3

Future

Future concerns whether the initiative expands or restricts possibilities.

Assessment Questions

Does the initiative create hope?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Are multiple futures imaginable?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Can different groups see themselves in the future being proposed?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Future Score

_____ / 15

Dimension 4

Narrative Boundaries

Narrative boundaries refer to invisible divisions created through language, planning, and representation.

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Assessment Questions

Does the initiative avoid creating an "us and them" dynamic?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Are overlooked communities acknowledged?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Does the initiative reduce rather than reinforce invisible boundaries?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Narrative Boundary Score

_____ / 15

Dimension 5

Legitimacy

Legitimacy concerns trust, participation, and recognition.

Assessment Questions

Have affected groups been meaningfully involved?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Is decision-making transparent?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Do people perceive the initiative as fair?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Legitimacy Score

_____ / 15

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Overall Score

Dimension	Score
Belonging	_____
Dignity	_____
Future	_____
Narrative Boundaries	_____
Legitimacy	_____

Total Score

_____ / 75

Interpreting Results

60–75

Strong Narrative Alignment

The initiative appears to support belonging, dignity, legitimacy, and inclusive futures.

Narrative risks are limited.

45–59

Moderate Narrative Risk

The initiative contains strengths but may overlook important perspectives, groups, or places.

Further reflection is recommended.

30–44

Significant Narrative Risk

Narrative vulnerabilities are present.

Additional assessment and dialogue are recommended.

Below 30

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High Narrative Risk

The initiative may unintentionally contribute to exclusion, invisibility, territorial stigma, or weakened belonging.

A full Narrative Impact Assessment is strongly recommended.

Narrative Profile

Beyond the total score, assessors should examine the profile across dimensions.

An initiative may score highly overall while still displaying weaknesses in specific areas.

Examples:

High Future + Low Belonging

A compelling vision that people struggle to connect with.

High Legitimacy + Low Dignity

Participation exists, but communities may still be framed through deficit narratives.

High Dignity + Low Future

Communities feel recognised, but lack a convincing sense of direction.

The profile often reveals more than the overall score.

Key Principle

The NIA Scorecard is guided by a simple proposition:

Development should not only improve places.

It should strengthen people's ability to belong within them.