Our Approach to Social and Behavior Change

Metropolitan Group (MG) is a global small business and a Certified B Corp that specializes in initiatives that create lasting and sustainable impact for people and communities. At MG, we design and implement social and behavior change (SBC) initiatives, work to shift narratives, build capacity of local partners, conduct and disseminate actionable research, and provide innovative strategic communication solutions. Since 1989, we've worked to directly impact social change in two core ways: 1) by creating strategic campaigns and initiatives that change enabling environments critical to shifting attitudes, behaviors, practices, policies, norms, and mindsets and 2) by building the capacity and resilience of change agents, institutions, organizations, and coalitions that drive social change. MG and its Mexico City-based sister company, Impacto Social Metropolitan Group (ISMG), work with national, state, and local governments, foundations, NGOs, and private sector partners.

We have worked in more than 30 countries across Africa, Latin America, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, and Southeast Asia. Our in-house staff in Mexico and the U.S. includes multiple bilingual speakers (English and Spanish), as well as staff who are professionally proficient in French, Portuguese, and Swahili. We have a network of local partners and co-create all narratives and messaging in local languages.

MG/ISMG is an innovator in designing and piloting SBC activities on efforts related to gender equality, democracy, and human rights as well as in sustainable development and global health. Social norms and dominant narratives are a critical factor in establishing enabling environments, impacting mindsets and either protecting or changing the status quo. SBC approaches that shift social norms play a key role in activities where the goals require more than a singular policy change and that seek long-term resilience of change.

Our comparative advantage in this field is that we focus SBC at the structural level and integrate individual behavior change to advance systemic change. MG/ISMG is deeply versed in all stages of SBC analysis, assessment, intervention design, and iterative implementation. We capture, apply and disseminate learnings to increase efficacy and impact, enable scaling, and contribute to the field. Our work is focused on norms and values that build social cohesion and cultivate democratic political culture and processes, which aligns with one of the four pivots of USAID's Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Policy launched in July 2024.

Key aspects of our SBC approach:
Public Will Building—a resilient SBC model to impact change at multiple levels (policy, practice, norms, culture, and behaviors). SBC, using the public will building model, focuses on engaging people—based on their closely held personal values. The end goal is change that is sustainable because it is owned by the people who demanded it. This is why we refer to such people as "stakeholders" in building public will rather than as "audiences." The word "audience" suggests a passive experience on the part of people who serve primarily as tools of a top-down effort, while "stakeholders" reflects people's vested interest and high personal stakes in the outcome of a public will building effort. Learn about MG's public will building model.

Stakeholder Mapping—an evidence and collective intelligence driven model to identify, understand, segment, prioritize and track activation and change across stakeholders. At MG we think of people and communities as "stakeholders"—people and communities that are impacted more by the status quo and have a deeply personal stake in creating change. Since the creation of sustainable social change requires that they be engaged not as passive recipients, but as active participants in everything. Whether they are private individuals or public officials, stakeholders have agency and a vested interest in the outcome of any social change initiative or enterprise. They also have critical insights on both the problem and its solution. Thus, they should be central to the design and implementation of the solution. And we find that thinking of people and communities as stakeholders results in better and more authentic engagement with them, and ultimately in more effective and sustainable social change efforts. Learn more about our stakeholder mapping model.

Shifting Narrative—a high impact methodology to influence the upstream information ecosystem, drive desired changes in the enabling environment, mindsets, and norms. Narratives shape our information ecosystem and mindsets, what we experience as normative, what we accept without challenge, and what we tolerate (or actively promote and protect) in the systems that surround and impact us. Narratives are both organic and orchestrated and the most effective are both and are centered on deeply held values. MG's innovative narrative shift model identifies, develops, tests, and builds currency for evidence-based narratives and supporting strategic message frameworks that impact both upstream and downstream information, social, political and cultural ecosystems and increase efficacy of SBC initiatives to advance changes in policies, practices, norms, and behaviors. Learn more about MG's narrative change model and watch this video overview.

Localization and Co-Creation—at MG we build authentic partnerships with local providers including private sector, civil society organizations (CSOs) and local government partners. We utilize a co-creation approach that amplifies and supports local expertise, shares and refines innovative models to have local relevance, and structures technical assistance (TA) and capacity building in a co-creation/shared expertise approach that designs and conducts research, designs interventions, develops and tests narratives and messaging, and conducts iterative implementation with local organizations as strategic partners and project co-designers. We develop nearly all in-country deliverables in these partnerships centering local context and developing in local language(s) and where needed then transcreating into English. We are deeply committed and believe SBC strategies require ongoing application across every activity life-cycle of "Do no harm" and "Do nothing for them without them" principles and a gender and social inclusion lens.

We offer a range of services that advance SBC within three integrated practices:
- **Strategic Communication and SBC**—SBC strategy development and implementation; narrative and strategic messaging design and testing; stakeholder mapping and engagement; formative research; audience research; policy and public sector transformation initiatives, social marketing campaigns; branding, digital strategy, and human-centered design; SBC training and TA
- **Intercultural Engagement and Social Inclusion**—creation of strategies and tools designed with cultural context, language nuance, and appropriate literacy levels; stakeholder assessments; equity, diversity, and inclusion-facilitated training; co-creation and nontraditional/locally centered evaluation and assessments
- **Organizational Strategy and Innovation**—change management; strategic planning; capacity building; training; leadership development; and TA

Local capacity building is integrated across all three of our practice areas to ensure increased resiliency of the changes achieved, increased opportunity for scaling and replication, and supported localization.

Client Examples
USAID

Countering Corruption Through SBC
MG was commissioned by the USAID Anti-corruption Task Force to conduct research on the use of SBC approaches to social norms and behaviors related to corruption and the development of recommendations to build a strong evidence base to improve current and future anti-corruption activities. Our work included five country case studies of anti-corruption initiatives that utilized elements of SBC in the Americas, Africa and Eastern Europe. Ultimately, we developed a set of

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[findings and recommendations](#) for elevating or incorporating these elements into anti-corruption interventions. Our experience in this field can support any initiative to better align to one of the four pivots of the new DRG Policy launched in July 2024: elevate anti-corruption as critical to democracy and development, with a focus on transnational corruption, grand corruption, and kleptocracy.

Advancing Women's Rights in Tunisia

MG/ISMG launched the [Advancing the Rights of Women Agriculture Workers](#) project, which applied SBC strategies to shift narratives that impact the rights of women workers. We partnered with two respected women's organizations in the interior regions of Tunisia, which co-led this project. Working together in Arabic, French, and English, we identified that the dominant narrative around Tunisian women agriculture workers frames them as victims only, ignoring their incredible strength and skills and their enormous contributions to society. With evidence and research, we then developed and tested a new narrative and messaging, which was applied through the "[Felha](#)" campaign. The campaign aims to shift core narratives and, ultimately, influence social norms and specific practices and policies that would improve fair treatment and offer better protection for women who work in agriculture. The narrative framework implemented through the pilot campaign gained enormous traction among women agriculture workers and key stakeholders, including governors; local authorities; local and national CSOs; and local, national, and international media. Prioritizing localization throughout this activity created full ownership of the narrative by women agriculture workers, their families, and even some male farmers, creating lasting impact for this community. This was a project under the Innovation Design Services Contract managed by Vistant.
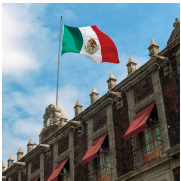
Improving Effectiveness of State-level Justice Institutions in Mexico

This five-year project (managed by DAI as the prime contractor) seeks to advance and support systemic transformations in the Mexican criminal justice system to reduce impunity and increase trust at the state level. MG/ISMG is providing TA and strategic communication to support judicial institutions, as well as nontraditional actors (civil society, private sector, academic sector), to advance resilient organizational and structural reforms that connect with end-users' values, needs, and expectations.

Conducting Democracy Narrative and Messaging Research and Development

MG/ISMG has worked closely with public sector and foundation funders to provide actionable narrative and values research, data, and evidence to inform strategy and more effective pro-democracy interventions. We have worked with local partners in more than 15 countries to map dominant narratives that advance democracy, democratic institutions, and democratic values or that delegitimize democracy and advance authoritarian practices and policies. We conduct deep formative research to understand the narrative landscape; use evidence and data to develop and test new narratives and messaging; and design innovative SBC strategies for application. Our work includes ongoing training, technical assistance, and capacity building. All of our research, narrative, message development, and testing is conducted in regional languages to ensure that localization is prioritized with our partners.

Advancing Civic Space and Civic Participation in Mexico

Social change agents often communicate without prioritizing stakeholders and without knowing which values and barriers they have to change their behaviors. With the SBC knowledge and tools we introduced and direct TA provided to a cohort of organizations working on civil society resilience, environment, gender equality and transparency and accountability, these groups developed SBC campaigns focusing on the specific behaviors their priority stakeholders need to change to advance towards more just, transparent, equitable and sustainable communities. In only a few months and as a result of our work specific behaviors changed: there was a 75% increase in the number of people reporting water leaks in the streets in a northern state, a 33% increase in organizations adjusting their fiscal strategies to fully comply with the regulatory framework nationally, and a 25% more people are volunteering in the organizations in a southern state of Mexico.This was accomplished through a combination of capacity building, direct TA, and support to a cohort of CSOs. This work was conducted in partnership with Making Cents International and Development Professionals International under Analytical Services IV – LACLEARN.

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Ford Foundation

In Mexico, MG partnered with CSOs, policymakers, and influencers to create and apply a 4-year groundbreaking SBC initiative to advance democracy, rule of law and human rights protection in severe human rights abuses, including forced disappearances, femicide, and state-sanctioned torture. It also had a component to advance civic participation and protect civic space as a cornerstone for democracy. Through innovative stakeholder mapping and deconstruction of dominant narratives that advance impunity, MG designed a new narrative that activates core values and engages citizens as part of an effort to build a more trusted judicial system. The narrative developed conveyed the relevance of creating a justice system people could trust to feel safe.

The initiative engaged millions and mobilized thousands through activities that counter disinformation and corruption and promote justice, the rule of law, and civil society activism. It countered the social norm of hopelessness and acceptance of corruption by demonstrating the power of collective action. It engaged, shifted the perceptions, and increased public articulation of expectations for justice through traditional media and social media campaigns and creative expressions at a large scale. National polling indicated growing alignment with the new narrative and indicator shifts on the issue of human rights and civic participation. It achieved outcomes on knowledge and attitudes, on behaviors, at the structural level and on social norms, including a 13% increase in people actively engaging in a community-based organization from 2017 to 2020 and a 10% increase in public perceptions on the relevance of actively participating in civic life.

Advancing Gender Equity in Guatemala and El Salvador

Through this project, MG/ISMG is working directly with grassroots organizations and media outlets to develop and convey SBC initiatives with their own intersectional narratives to advance gender equity, justice, and rule of law at local and national levels. Based on understanding the existing narrative landscape, the attacks these groups are suffering, and the mechanisms certain groups are deploying for these attacks, MG/ISMG is providing direct TA to create hope-based narratives and SBC communication initiatives to advance gender equality and CSO goals.

Human Rights Work in El Salvador

With philanthropic funding, MG/ISMG developed a [collaborative campaign](#) to call for the release of women who have been imprisoned in El Salvador as a result of suffering obstetric emergencies. This campaign helped elevate and leverage the work that has, for many years, been carried out by local Salvadoran CSOs. MG/ISMG developed the strategy for the campaign in partnership with local CSOs, international women's and reproductive rights advocates, and others. As a result, all the imprisoned women have been released and allowed to return home to their families.

Humanity United

We worked with a consortium of research partners to map salient migration narratives across five country case studies and published our findings in a report titled "[How We Talk About Migration: The Link Between Migration Narratives, Policy, and Power](#)." The research mapped and analyzed similarities in migration narratives in very different political and cultural contexts and highlighted how migration narratives are increasingly weaponized to advance a range of anti immigration political agendas. In follow-on work, we examined root causes of migration, including the impact of violence and conflict on communities in Central America, and we published "[Migration Narratives in Northern Central America: How Competing Stories Shape Policy and Public Opinion in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador](#)."

Key Team

[Eric Friedenwald-Fishman](#)—SBC innovator: creative director/CEO/founder, MG/ISMG
As creative director, Eric drives strategy development for MG/ISMG. He is an innovator in using values-based SBC methodologies to create resilient changes in social norms, policies, practices, and behaviors. He is an expert in analyzing and developing narratives. In addition, he developed the [Public Will Building](#) model and is a pioneer in narrative research, design, testing and application. Eric has worked to counter corruption and impunity, address hyperpolarization, strengthen democratic institutions and good governance, counter violent extremism, reduce hate crimes, address climate change, conserve and restore natural resources, advance public health. Clients include USAID, NASA, U.S. Forest Service, Ford Foundation, and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

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Haim Malka—international policy expert: executive vice president, MG
Haim works on a global portfolio of narrative, messaging, and SBC campaigns focused on advancing democracy and countering malign actors. He spent nearly 20 years as a conflict resolution and security researcher and analyst in North Africa and the Middle East before joining MG in 2019. He has conducted research and analysis for numerous U.S. government agencies, with a focus on countering violent extremism, ethnic conflict, and political violence. At MG, he has led work with NASA and USAID.

Rodolfo Córdova Alcaraz—social justice co-lead: executive vice president, ISMG
With 20 years of experience, Rodolfo has created SBC initiatives and strategies to advance democracy, civic space, good governance, and human rights in the Americas, Europe, and Africa by applying a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens. He leads the efforts in Latin America. Before joining ISMG, he served in numerous strategic leadership positions, including deputy director at the Foundation of Justice and Rule of Law in Mexico. He has served as senior consultant for the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the UN Migration.

Erin Rebecca Bloom—SBC and narrative expert: senior director, MG
Erin is an international legal and policy expert with experience in peace negotiations, fragile and transitional states, and public safety and security. Prior to joining MG, Erin served as a technical legal advisor to the Syrian Opposition delegation for the 2016 and 2017 Geneva Peace Talks. She has also worked extensively on crime and gun violence reduction efforts in multiple U.S. cities and is a veteran of the U.S. Air Force. Since joining MG, she has worked with USAID on several SBC activities including anti-corruption and democratic narratives.

MG/ISMG has a full team of 50-plus experts and practitioners that includes strategic communication and policy specialists; researchers; narrative change and SBC experts; gender equity and inclusion leaders; multilingual facilitators; innovators in visual communication, design, and digital engagement; and others.

Contract Vehicles
We hold the General Services Administration (GSA) Professional Services Schedule, and are a leading partner with The Cloudburst Group under USAID's Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Bureau's Learning, Evaluation, and Research III Task Order. We are a resource partner on USAID's Digital APEX mechanism managed by Vistant. We have joined teams on Analytical Services IV for LACLEARN and SEGA tasking, and we are a subcontractor to DAI for Mexico's ConJusticia contract.

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Procurement Designation
Small Business

Schedules
541-2: Public Relations Services
541-4a: Market Research and Analysis
874-1: Integrated Consulting Services

NAICS Codes
541430, 541611, 541613, 541618, 541720, 541810, 541820, 541830, 541840, 541890, 541910, 541990

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