MOTIVE3 CASE STUDY · BUILD. GOVERN. ACTIVATE.

How XPRIZE Built the *Narrative Infrastructure* to Match Its Impact

A thirty-year-old prize foundation had the vision, the proof of impact, and the credibility in the market. What it didn't have was a system for communicating its mission — and proving its impact coherently across diverse domains of practice. Here's how we built one — and what three interconnected projects revealed about narrative architecture at organizational scale.

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CASE STUDY · 2025–2026

AT A GLANCE

The case in *brief.*

THE ORGANIZATION	XPRIZE — a global nonprofit that designs and runs large-scale incentive prizes to solve humanity's most pressing challenges. Thirty years in operation. $519M in prize capital / $31B in economic and social value. Prizes spanning climate, health, learning, space, and ocean exploration.
THE SITUATION	Despite measurable, world-changing impact, XPRIZE faced persistent narrative fragmentation: low brand recognition, low narrative clarity, and no operational system for capturing or deploying its most compelling stories.
WHAT WAS BUILT	A Messaging Playbook · A Story Engine · A coordinated set of frontline activation assets (a redesigned Impact Report, an introductory donor deck, and a social-media exemplar).
THE BOARD'S OWN QUESTION	Why wasn't recognition matching the results they've produced? XPRIZE's board posed that challenge plainly — expressing genuine frustration that an organization with thirty years of impact and global credibility hadn't achieved the prominence its work deserved.

What follows is the answer.

THE DIAGNOSIS

High recognition. *Low clarity.*

XPRIZE occupies a rare category. The name opens doors in boardrooms, government agencies, and philanthropic circles globally. Its model has produced verifiable breakthroughs: a $30 smartphone diagnostic that detects tuberculosis with 91% accuracy in field conditions, a tablet learning system now reaching 13.6 million children across 26 countries, a $1.5 million water prize won by a team that built a tropical rainforest in a box, and the original $10 million Ansari XPRIZE that ushered in the age of commercial spaceflight, which has since bloomed into a $613 billion global space economy.

None of that translated automatically into a clear story that funders could invest in, and that the public could understand.

When Geetanjali Dhillon joined as Chief Marketing Officer — the fifth person to hold that role in five years — she inherited an organization whose communications were technically dense, audience-fragmented, and story-poor despite the organization itself being story-rich. The external perception, surfaced bluntly during an early discovery workshop, was that XPRIZE looked like "a science fair for billionaires." Internally, teams led with science and metrics. End-user beneficiaries—the people who benefited from the innovations shepherded through the XPRIZE process—were largely absent from external storytelling. The word moonshot, used so frequently in internal conversations that it had become ambient, had long since stopped landing with the urgency its speakers intended.

The structural problem was specific: XPRIZE had meager brand awareness in some circles, but even those who had heard of XPRIZE didn't understand what they actually did. Those are different deficits, and the solutions to them are different.

Brand awareness doesn't assume understanding. A donor prospect who has heard of XPRIZE but can't explain in a sentence what it actually does or why it beats the alternatives is not a warm prospect. Familiarity in the absence of clarity tends to generate nods, not decisions. In a fundraising context, that pattern is expensive.

This is also one of the most pernicious problems in mature mission-driven organizations. The longer an organization has operated, the more its internal language drifts from any outsider's vocabulary. The richer its archive of real stories, the less systematically those stories get deployed. Scale creates familiarity, and familiarity tends to dim the impact signal.

PART 1 · BUILD

A messaging architecture that *unifies the organization.*

The first project was the Messaging Playbook, developed through a cross-functional workshop in March 2025. The room included Anousheh Ansari (CEO), Geetanjali Dhillon (CMO), Andrew Tauhert (Chief Impact Officer), Steele Ford (Chief Advancement Officer), and the senior leaders responsible for marketing, communications, brand, and strategy. The goal was to surface what was true about XPRIZE, and what those involved already believed based on lived experience — and then compress those findings into provable claims and language sharp enough to travel.

What emerged in the room was striking for its candor.

Ansari was direct about the market gap XPRIZE occupies: no other organization is focused on problems at the scale and ambition XPRIZE pursues. She described XPRIZE's posture as fundamentally long-range — the organization looks a decade ahead, identifies the problems that will become crises, and commits to solving them now, audaciously. On capital strategy, she framed prizes not as competitions but as directed energy: XPRIZE deploys funding precisely where market failures have left solutions stalled, channeling capital toward the problems and timelines the market won't address on its own.

These weren't platitudes. They were beliefs, stated out loud by a leader speaking from what she herself had experienced and witnessed—reaching for language big enough to make the sheer audacity of XPRIZE's work comprehensible.

The advancement team's pressure on the room was equally specific. Steele Ford had been watching the development team try to package a research-grade message for a fundraising audience, and the friction was constant. He articulated the core communications tension inside the organization: too many engineers trying to engineer the message, when what donors needed was rhetoric, not rigor.

What Ford wanted wasn't scripting—it was structure. He described his approach as giving the team a load-bearing outline they could improvise around: a clear sequence they could follow while filling it with their own facts and anecdotes in the right order. That insight became the operating principle of the playbook: a load-bearing structure that frontline teams could improvise around without losing coherence. It also hinted at what would become a pilot for building their story engine, populated by previously unsurfaced human benefit stories that weren't being captured.

What the playbook delivered

A positioning that could carry the weight of the work

XPRIZE had been positioned as a prize operator. What the organization actually is — and what nothing in its language had ever said in a single breath — is audacious, rigorous, and paradigm-shifting at once. The playbook named the category XPRIZE had invented and never claimed:

> *XPRIZE is where breakthroughs are born, built, proven, and scaled.*

Three messaging pillars build a moat around the positioning:

→ **Audacious in Ambition**

→ **Rigorously Designed for Outcomes**

→ **Catalyzing Lasting, Paradigm-Shifting Change.**

Audacity without rigor reads as spectacle. Rigor without audacity reads as a research lab. XPRIZE is the rare organization that delivers on both, which result in lasting change.

Critically, the messaging playbook was built bottom-up — from the organization's real facts, surfaced in the room, not from an aspirational statement written on a whiteboard. XPRIZE's own leadership later described the result to the staff: differentiation that resists imitation because it is grounded in what only XPRIZE has actually done.

A throughline of benefit statements — each one load-bearing

Every claim in the architecture runs the same chain: attribute (verifiable facts) → advantage → support → proof → story. Nothing floats.

For example:

> **Audacious in ambition**
>
> Becomes a mandate big enough to matter — supported by the decade-ahead problem posture and the willingness to commit early — proven by world-first prize targets that reframe what "solvable" looks like — made human through the teams that attempt what institutions won't touch until it's safe.

> **Rigorously designed for outcomes**
>
> Becomes donor capital that's de-risked — supported by validation protocols — proven by standards that informed ISO 14034 and metrics adopted by the EPA — made human by a $30 smartphone diagnostic detecting tuberculosis with 91% accuracy in field conditions.

> **Catalyzing lasting change**
>
> Becomes philanthropic dollars that don't fade — they multiply — supported by post-prize adoption pathways and follow-on investment — proven by $19.1M in follow-on investment into Global Learning teams, against $1.9M before the prize — made human by 13.6 million children learning on a tablet.

This is what advancement had never had: not talking points, but a spine — with the evidence already attached.

An ICP-aligned narrative, not three different ones

Three funder segments, each mapped to its own fears, decision speed, and emotional trigger: ultra-high net worth donors who want a legacy of irreversible change; corporate partners who need alignment that is defensible, not performative; governments that move slowly and require rigor before they move at all.

The same architecture serves all three. What changes is emphasis — never the claim. XPRIZE's own summary of this to its staff: everyone speaks from the same playbook, not the same script.

And underneath all of it — a shared vocabulary

When a development officer and a prize operations manager reach for the same language, they are no longer coordinating messaging. They are implicitly coordinating strategy.

PART 2 · GOVERN

Building the system that keeps the architecture *fed.*

The playbook surfaced a problem it could not solve on its own.

Every messaging architecture requires proof. The stronger the positioning claim — and XPRIZE's claims are strong — the higher the evidentiary bar. Sophisticated donors, particularly at the level XPRIZE needs to cultivate, want more than metrics and case-summary statistics. They want human stories: specific, verifiable, emotionally grounded accounts of what actually changed in someone's life as a result of the work. This category of proof is the one that mature mission-driven organizations struggle most to produce consistently.

XPRIZE's specific version of the problem had a name: 120 terabytes of archives in cold storage. Thirty years of alumni transcripts, Trailblazer video recordings, testing-phase field notes and footage, application materials, and institutional memory held by long-tenured staff. The stories existed. No one had built a system to surface them.

The Story Engine pilot

The pilot, run from January through March 2026, was designed to answer one operational question: Can an AI-assisted mining process extract verifiable, donor-ready story material from existing organizational archives in less than ninety days?

The answer was yes — faster than expected, with richer outputs than anyone anticipated.

The process ran in three phases:

01

AI Mining

Archives loaded into a language-model environment with the playbook and a proprietary story schema as the filtering lens. The model surfaced candidate stories on a human-as-protagonist criterion.

02

Human Verification

Every candidate story is quarantined until it moves through a structured review that validates the facts. Nothing reaches deployment without sign-off.

03

Searchable Database

Verified stories enter a tagged library — domain, story type, protagonist, provenance, source links. A library of stories only XPRIZE can tell.

Where the stories actually were

Before mining anything, we mapped the sources — an audit of where the highest-value stories might live and who controlled access. Five potential sources came through, but four of them came back thin when stress-tested.

One source was a goldmine. A two-person team whose function was three years young and hadn't had a listed page on the XPRIZE website until the year prior was sitting on a folder of Zoom transcripts: webinars, pre-panel interviews, and monthly speaker series that had been quietly wound down due to low attendance. Nobody had examined them for stories.

> *That folder produced 91 admissible story kernels from 28 recordings. Every one had a re-tellable story and a source that could be verified.*

The revelation was the asymmetry.

XPRIZE didn't have a story problem. It had thirty years of extraordinary human outcomes and one narrow channel through which few of them ever reached the organization — a channel that existed almost by accident, run by two people, unlisted on the website. Everywhere else the stories thinned out. The insight was palpable: XPRIZE's teams almost never encounter the people their work changes. The prize is awarded. The team scales. The outcome lands somewhere in the world, and no one at the foundation is standing there when it does.

Story scarcity is a design signal. It shows you exactly where an organization has structured itself away from its own impact. That finding was worth more than the map.

What the pilot found

Twenty story kernels were verified and structured in the first ninety days.

The Burning Man Ragtag Team

A group so unconventional they were initially excluded from the Water Abundance Prize finals. They built a functioning tropical rainforest in a box and won $1.5 million.

CleanRobotics & Pandemic Diligence

During COVID, when VCs could not visit startups in person, CleanRobotics sent XPRIZE's formal evaluation reports to investors as third-party diligence — and closed a round without a single in-person meeting.

Cloud DX & the $30 Diagnostic

Disqualified from competition twice. Cloud DX eventually secured post-prize funding that sent them to Mozambique. A $30 smartphone now detects tuberculosis with 91% accuracy in field conditions.

Enuma & 13.6 Million Learners

A tablet distributed to children in remote rural villages across Tanzania didn't just reach its intended users — it drew in parents and older siblings. Enuma now reaches 13.6 million learners across 26 countries.

WHAT THE ARCHIVE WAS HOLDING

Inside a bustling K-12 school in Bangalore, India, an elevator operator spent fifteen years pressing buttons in complete silence. With no knowledge of English, she watched passengers come and go each day without saying a word. Then, the school licensed a gamified literacy app created by Adult Literacy XPRIZE winner Learning Upgrade. After putting nearly 300 hours into the app's musical lessons on her smartphone, everything changed. Today, she isn't just operating the elevator—she's chatting comfortably in English with the students, teachers, and parents who step inside.

No one at XPRIZE knew that story. It had been told once, on a call, and had been sitting in a transcript in a folder nobody opened.

When it was played back to Anousheh Ansari, she was visibly moved. "I had no idea we could go this deep." She had a fundraising event later that evening and requested four more stories to take with her.

XPRIZE had always been able to report that its Adult Literacy prize reached millions. What it had never been able to do was let anyone feel how it affected a single individual.

The material had always been there. What was missing was the infrastructure to surface it, verify it, and put it in front of the people who needed to hear it. The pilot closed that gap.

PART 3 · ACTIVATE

Three surfaces, *one architecture.*

A narrative architecture is only useful when it shows up in the work the organization actually puts in front of people. The third project was activation — translating the playbook and the story engine into frontline assets that perform without explanation. Three surfaces took the spotlight: the Impact Report, a donor deck, and a social-media exemplar.

Surface 1 · The Impact Report

Andrew Tauhert, XPRIZE's Chief Impact Officer, was candid about the prior impact report's design philosophy: it had been intentionally arid. He had instructed the creative department to strip it down at the time of its creation — the goal was credibility through restraint, a signal of scientific rigor for an audience he was specifically trying to reach.

It worked at one level. For the audiences XPRIZE actually needed to move — donors, sponsors, institutional partners — it produced a document that confirmed seriousness. But what it had in seriousness, it lacked in emotional resonance.

The rebuild ran the report through the playbook's structure. The new Impact Report was downloaded twice as many times in its first month as the prior version had been across two years. The shift was in the story architecture carrying the data, rather than the data trying to carry the story.

Surface 2 · The Introductory Donor Deck

XPRIZE's existing donor deck answered every question a donor might have — what prizes have run, what the impact metrics are, who the notable teams are. But it answered those questions at the expense of the question that actually drives a first-touch donor to take a next step: Why should I care, and what role can I play?

The constraint on the rebuild evolved during the build itself. The deck was originally scoped to be a standalone sendable asset; over the course of the work, advancement determined that it would more often be presented live, with a development officer talking the audience through it. The constraint shifted from autonomy to speed. The deck needed to land its message inside the small attention window a first-touch donor gives a new organization, regardless of who was in the room.

The rebuild organized around five structural requirements:

01 **An opening claim**
positions XPRIZE as the missing infrastructure between world-scale problems and market-scale solutions.

02 **A single, simple mechanism**
how donor capital moves through the XPRIZE model and becomes validated impact.

03 **An explicit account of unrestricted funding**
what it pays for, why it is essential, and what it compounds over time.

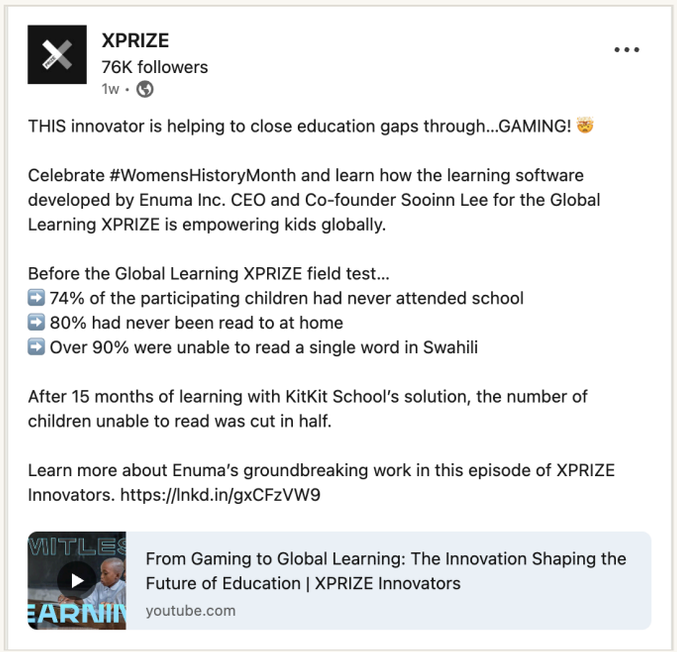
04 **One human proof story**
drawn from the kernel library, structured to a "Barbecue Test" standard, meaning it can be retold in casual conversation, like a barbecue, without losing its weight.

05 **A clear bridge to the next meeting**
so the deck closes with a natural next conversation, not a soft maybe.

Surface 3 · The Social Makeover

The social piece served a different function from the Impact Report and the donor deck. It was not a campaign deployed to the market. It was a demonstration — a deliberate before-and-after exemplar built to show the social team what playbook-aligned content with mined stories looks like in a feed-native format, so the pattern could carry into the day-to-day work.

BEFORE



Before: Hashtag-led, statistic-stacked, structurally generic. Abstract stakes.

After: Same proof base, restructured around a human protagonist and a question. Opening on Sooinn Lee, the parent and co-founder of Enuma. Tracing a refusal, a build, a field test, an unexpected outcome — and landing on a claim, not a CTA. Same evidence base. Different load order. Different unit of attention.

AFTER

John Smith • 1st
XPRIZE
2h •

What if the future of global education started with one parent refusing to accept the system?

When Sooinn Lee's child struggled to learn in a traditional classroom, she didn't look for a workaround.

She questioned the entire model.

No classrooms.
No teachers.
No assumptions about how learning "should" happen.

Instead, she and her husband—both game developers—built something radically different: a learning experience where children teach themselves through play. Hatching virtual eggs. Solving challenges. Progressing at their own pace.

It became Kitkit School.

Then came the real test.

In remote Tanzanian villages, children with no access to schools were handed tablets loaded with the software. No instructions. No training.

And something unexpected happened.

The children didn't just learn.
They became the teachers.

Parents and older siblings gathered around, watching, learning, participating.

AFTER (CONTINUED)

What started as a single-user app became a community learning engine.

This is what happens when innovation is designed for real-world conditions—not ideal ones.

And the impact didn't stop there.

Today, Enuma's tools reach millions of learners globally

Their solutions have been deployed across 55+ countries

And they helped prove something many thought impossible:
Children can achieve foundational literacy—without schools or teachers

That proof didn't just change one company.
It helped redefine what's possible for 250 million children worldwide who lack access to education.

This is the power of breakthroughs built to scale.

Not ideas.
Not pilots.
Proven systems that change how the world works.



1,234 56 comments • 23 reposts

Like Comment Repost Send

Treating the social rebuild as a teaching artifact rather than a campaign was deliberate. It is one thing to write three exceptional posts. It is another to give an internal team a clear template they can replicate without losing the architecture's coherence. The Impact Report, the donor deck, and the social rebuild pull from the same source material. They are not three projects. They are one architecture, deployed three ways.

OUTCOMES

What the three projects produced *together.*

2×

IMPACT REPORT

Impact Report downloads in one month versus two years for the prior version

$500K

FUNDING

Personal funding pledge from a board member, attributable to a playbook-driven presentation

20

STORY ENGINE

Verified, deployment-ready story kernels produced in a 90-day pilot from 120TB of cold archive

30 yrs

COMMUNICATIONS

A senior XPRIZE leader called the new website the strongest communications work in the organization's 30-year history. The site was built entirely from the new messaging architecture and mined stories.

BEYOND THE NUMBERS · QUALITATIVE SHIFTS

→ Fundraising teams enter donor meetings with a shared vocabulary and standardized conversation guides for the first time.

→ Internal language across communications, advancement, and operations now draws from the same source.

→ A 30-year archive of human-impact stories is now in the process of becoming accessible, verifiable, and mapped to specific donor audiences.

→ Frontline assets work as a coordinated system, not a collection of one-offs.

> *One architecture. Three surfaces. Outcomes that compound.*

FOR ENTERPRISE COMMUNICATIONS LEADERS

Four *lessons* from the work.

LESSON 01

Messaging clarity is an organizational capability — not a communications function.

The breakthrough the messaging workshop produced was a shared accounting of what XPRIZE believed, stated in language clear enough to travel. Organizations that delegate this work to a communications team and ask for a document back typically get a document that sits unused.

LESSON 02

Story poverty is a systems failure — not a creativity failure.

The richest story material in most organizations lives in operations, field teams, and alumni networks — not in communications. The fix is building a capture and verification system that makes the material accessible.

LESSON 03

A playbook without a story engine is an argument without evidence.

When proof is abstract — metrics, aggregate impact numbers — the claim stays in the cognitive register. When proof is human and specific — a named person, a real moment, a verifiable outcome — it moves into the emotional register. That is where decisions are made.

LESSON 04

Sequencing matters. The sequence is Build, Govern, Activate.

Build the narrative architecture first. Govern it second — establish systems that keep it fed with verified proof and consistent language. Activate third — deploy into frontline assets that must perform without support. Attempting activation before building the architecture produces the fragmented, inconsistent output most large organizations recognize as the default state of their communications.

CONCLUSION

The impact was real. The story was *trapped.*

XPRIZE arrived with a board question that sounded like a communications problem: Why aren't we famous yet? It was an infrastructure problem.

The organization had the mission, the evidence, the credibility, and the stories. What it lacked was the architecture that connects those elements and keeps them operational — a shared language, a story supply system, and frontline assets built to convert awareness into belief. The three projects documented here produced measurable outcomes. What they also produced is a model: a sequence for building narrative infrastructure in organizations where the mission is real but the story is trapped.

> *The mission of most consequential organizations runs ahead of their narrative.*
> *The gap is the work.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Founder of Motive3 and the architect of the Actionable Message Playbook™ and the Idiograph™ story mining agent. Motive3 works with enterprise leaders and mission-driven organizations to build narrative infrastructure — the systems that make a brand's core story findable, verifiable, and deployable at scale.

MOTIVE3 · Build, govern, and activate your brand's stories at scale.

REFERENCES

Xprize.org

XPRIZE story engine mined artifacts

Consulting engagement transcripts

Need help applying this to your business? We'll help you spot what's working, what's not, and what to do next. Email us at hello@motive3.com, and where to go next.