

Strategic CaseMaking™ is What We Do.

Equitable and Inclusive Systems Change is the Result

Need to Deliver Bad News? No one likes bad news. Bad news is hard to hear and it's hard to give. And, it's especially tough to give as we advocate for better housing policies. Whether we're giving feedback to policymakers, trying to encourage continued support from community residents after a tough but unsuccessful local fight, or giving the latest stats on homelessness - we all dread giving and getting bad news. Why? Because humans have what is known as a negativity bias. That means bad news hits us much harder than good news and stays with us longer. This is the product of evolution. That's especially challenging since a lot of our messaging about housing is crisis and problem oriented. Here are some tips shared during our session to deliver that news:

- ✓ Do not start with the bad news, **start by speaking to the aspirations** of the audiences to which you are talking (*i.e. we are innovators, problem-solvers, etc.*)
- ✓ As you pivot to the "bad news", **remind your audiences of their stake** in continuing to press hard on the issue
- ✓ **Position the solutions** you are working on as credible, achievable and scaleable
- ✓ **Provide examples** of where the solutions have already worked in other places - in places as local and as close as possible - to help overcome public cynicism

Looking to Avoid the Backfire Effect? - In a perfectly rational world, when people encountered evidence that challenged their beliefs, they would first evaluate this evidence, and then adjust their beliefs accordingly. However, in reality this is seldom the case. What happens more often is that people encounter evidence that should cause them to doubt their existing beliefs but they reject that evidence and strengthen their support for their original stance. This is a cognitive bias known as the backfire effect. It is important to understand since it affects both your ability to change other people's opinions as well as to garner their support for policy reform. Here are a couple strategies to help you get started:

- ✓ **Reframe the conversation from the start** - that is, avoid the narratives that are consistently backfiring and intentionally trigger a conversation that constructively leads back to housing issues (*i.e. San Francisco is the hub of ingenuity, our prosperity depends on our resourcefulness and our resourcefulness only functions if we have a place to shelter it...*)
- ✓ **Find something in the existing narrative that you CAN connect to** (*i.e. we all agree that the current situation is not working...*), acknowledge the commonality of your thinking there, and then pivot to your own frame (*or to the evidence that might be contrarian to their views*)
- ✓ **Offer a new direction** - a more aspirational way forward based on a more inclusive and thoughtful set of values

Need Help Centering Racial Equity? Although most of us readily acknowledge the need to address and center “equity” as part of our work, it can be tough to operationalize this in our messaging. Many of us are still working to craft explicit language on the significance of race equity and we are unwilling to stay silent about the way that housing policies have created and preserved racial inequities. The good news is that it is possible to have a constructive conversation about racial equity in housing and also have our community stakeholders, policymakers and institutions embrace the messaging. Want to position a stronger equity frame in your messaging? Here’s a start:

- ✓ **Start by lifting up values** that help your listeners see their stake in resolving racial equity issues
- ✓ **Be explicit and name equity** as a foundational metric of success for the work
- ✓ **Invite others to join you** and let them know that you’ll evaluate their efforts by how their work impacts those equity metrics
- ✓ **Identify why this is a catalytic moment** to successfully address issues of equity
- ✓ **Be explicit that equity issues are urgent** and inextricable from housing issues more generally
- ✓ **Be explicit that the issue of racial equity is a systems problem**
- ✓ **Be explicit that feasible solutions already exist and give concrete examples of when and where they have worked**

Recognize the power of outcomes-based messaging? It is hard to miss the growing public cynicism. Many people have lost the belief that by working together, we can solve tough issues like racial equity, housing, health care, climate change or any of the top issues that impact our communities. In the face of a constant barrage of negative news and information, it is no wonder why so many Americans have given up on the idea that anything positive can come from collective advocacy. Moreover, the public perception that there is no accountability for policymakers makes it more difficult to organize our communities to push for necessary policy reforms and systems changes. As a result, outcomes-based messaging is especially important and powerful. Here’s a few ideas for wielding this strategy effectively:

- ✓ **Highlight data upfront that outlines what outcomes you are working toward** and make sure those **outcomes are in the future** where your listeners are likely to be more optimistic about the prospects of your success (*i.e. by 2026, maximizing prevention would bring homelessness down by 30% across this region – that’s why we’re excited to have your partnership*)
- ✓ **Use data that helps you to tell the “story of us”** – that is, data that includes everyone (so income data would include both people earning low-wages as well as those across other parts of the income spectrum). This helps to avoid “othering”.
- ✓ **Paint a strong picture of what the vision of the future could look like and the feasibility of actually getting there** (*i.e. we could solve homelessness in San Francisco by reallocating all of the money we raise from parking fines between September to December each year*).