

Vision, Values, and Voice



A Communications Toolkit



The **Opportunity** Agenda

*Building the National Will
to Expand Opportunity in America*

ABOUT

The Opportunity Agenda

The Opportunity Agenda launched in 2006 with the mission of building the national will to expand opportunity in America. Focused on moving hearts, minds, and policy over time, we work with social justice groups, leaders, and movements to advance solutions that expand opportunity for everyone.

Through active partnerships, The Opportunity Agenda synthesizes and translates research on barriers to opportunity and corresponding solutions; uses communications and media to understand and influence public opinion; and identifies and advocates for policies that improve people's lives.

To develop 21st century communicators who can move hearts and minds on social justice issues, we conduct dozens of communications trainings across the country each year, focused primarily on discussing tough issues like race, poverty, immigration, and criminal justice in ways that will move key audiences. Trainings include "Strategic Communications 101," intensives for more advanced spokespersons, convenings on opinion and media research, and strategy sessions for movement leaders and coalitions to develop shared narratives and collective storytelling. By 2015, we will have trained and briefed more than 30,000 social justice leaders.

The Opportunity Agenda also conducts a range of media and public opinion research on the topics that define opportunity. We distribute our findings broadly through reports with actionable recommendations, briefings, and translations into messaging guidance and talking points that spokespersons need in order to respond in a 24-hour news cycle.

We have it in our power as a nation to expand opportunity for all. Doing so requires working to turn our beliefs and aspirations into public support for fundamental change.

To learn more about The Opportunity Agenda and to receive our resources, go to:
www.opportunityagenda.org.



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INTRODUCTION

The American ideal of opportunity is deeply embedded in our national consciousness. It's about fairness and participation, human rights and human dignity. It binds us together as a diverse nation and it offers profound hope for the future.

Like the superhero images that flow throughout, we hope the following will help you unleash your innate power to be a voice of change toward greater and more equal opportunity in America.

Opportunity, we believe, is a theme that can unite social justice messages and constituencies while building bridges across a range of issues including civil and human rights, housing, employment, criminal justice, education, immigration, and other spheres where opportunity is at risk. While each of these issues needs focused attention and distinct solutions, talking about them through a common lens of opportunity can help build a powerful and diverse alliance of voices for change.

History shows that, to be effective in moving hearts, minds, and policy over the long term, we need more integrated and strategic messaging that mobilizes our base, while also working to expand our constituencies by bringing those in the middle toward our cause. We can do this with a strong, values-based narrative like Opportunity for All, that can change the larger national conversation, shift the culture, and result in lasting change.

In past decades, we saw the power of conservative narratives like “family values,” “big government,” and “personal responsibility” move the country away from a social justice vision across multiple issues and campaigns. A generation earlier, civil rights and, before that, the New Deal exemplified powerful progressive themes. In this new century, the theme of opportunity and the techniques described in this toolkit can help to set the public discourse, as well as public policy, back on track.

The toolkit focuses on that broader goal—identifying universal themes and values that tie together a range of issues. When our shorter-term campaigns and other communications efforts begin to add up to a larger, more cohesive story about values and a positive vision, we will each begin to see individual victories add up to transformative societal change.

COMMUNICATIONS

BIG-PICTURE THINKING

The word “communications” is a necessarily broad term, referring to a range of different strategies and activities. In the social justice world we communicate about issues, big ideas, specific policies, organizations, aspirations, fundraising needs, and so on. While it seems obvious, it’s important that all of these communications support and complement each other strategically. Branding, crisis communications, campaign communications and the like are all crucial strategies, and they don’t exist on their own. They should add up to something bigger and longer term: an effort to move hearts, minds, and policy in the same direction over time. By starting with this big-picture thinking, we can better organize and prioritize the rest of our communications efforts. Doing so takes a little bit of time. But with limited resources to expend, strategy and priorities are more important than ever.

USING THIS TOOLKIT: BIG-PICTURE THINKING TO BRASS TACKS

The focus of this toolkit is two-fold: to outline framing principles and strategies that support the long-term movement of hearts and minds, and apply them toward shorter-term victories. The guidance included here is rooted in a large body of opinion and media research; in established communications techniques; and in the shared experience of hundreds of advocates, policymakers, and communications strategists from around the country.

In addition to big-picture thinking about communications strategy, you will also find tips and examples of a range of tactics, and concrete messaging guidance. The latter is in the form of detachable “Opportunity Flashcards,” the first set of an ongoing series of cards that provide short and easy-to-find advice and sample language on a range of social justice issues. Each card provides a link to more in-depth information on our website. As we produce more cards, they will be available for ordering and downloading on our website: www.opportunityagenda.org

We hope this toolkit continues to expand and grow as we add more examples, talking points, and research over time. Please continue to check our website for updates and to provide suggestions and feedback via our toolkit survey.

STRATEGY

MAKING A PLAN

Building Communications Strategies

There is no one perfect way to build a strategy. But it *is* important to think strategically about everything you're doing. Matching tactics to goals and time frames, segmenting and prioritizing audiences, and evaluating your progress should be a part of your everyday communications work. And realizing that no strategy is set in stone is also key because circumstances change. What should not change, though, is a tight alignment of communications resources with organizational goals.

Step 1: Determine Organizational Goals

Any communications efforts should serve overarching organizational, campaign, or movement goals. Once these larger goals are defined and understood, you can start asking questions about how communications can support them. Without this critical first step, it's difficult to determine how to focus and allocate communications resources.

Step 2: Determine Communications Goals

When drafting communications goals, identify target audiences, actions, and timelines.

- * **Target audience** – These are the groups and individuals whose behaviors you need to change to reach your goal.
- * **Action** – It's crucial to state exactly what you need them to do, or how you need them to change. It's not enough for an audience to be aware of your issue. Do you need them to vote, boycott, or influence someone else?
- * **Timeline and priorities** – Prioritize the audiences you can realistically reach and persuade in the time available.

FOR MORE IDEAS ABOUT TARGETING AUDIENCES, SEE PAGE 9

Step 3: Research

Public opinion: Consider what you know about your target audiences—and find out more. Where do they stand on the issue? What do they find persuasive or repugnant—what are the barriers and opportunities to get them on board? How can you find out more about what they think? Public opinion research can be a key resource, but so can talking to a range of people in that group and to people who are familiar with them. This is particularly true if you're looking at a localized group such as a school board or congregation.

Media: Determine how people are talking about your issue and how you'd like to intervene. Media research is an important component in this step. Regular media monitoring and analysis show trends over time in coverage and conversations and can also show how and if your strategy is working. It may also help to identify reporters and commentators who can help to convey your message.

Field: It's important to talk to others who work on your issue from different perspectives. While it's not always possible to share a communications strategy, you should at the very least have some understanding of

the broader advocacy and organizing landscape. Also, don't overlook the valuable intelligence you can glean from your peers. There is a wealth of information and expertise among folks who have been talking about these issues for years as well as from those with a fresher take.

FOR MORE IDEAS ABOUT COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH, SEE PAGE 10

Step 4: Framing, Narrative, and Message Development.

Create messages by determining where your audiences stand on the issue right now and where they are most open to change. Identify what is important to them, the values you share with them, the barriers to getting them to act, and any opportunities to persuade. Identify narratives and messages that work together to support both your long-term and short-term goals. Think “opportunity!”

FOR MORE IDEAS ABOUT:

Framing:	13
Talking about values:	14
Narrative development:	18
Message development:	20

Step 5: Create an Outreach Strategy

* Reaching Your Target Audiences

- **Traditional media:** Determine which media the target audience and their influencers consume. Identify the tactics that will best match your goals—for example, will you hold a press event, conduct a paid advertising campaign, spearhead a letters to the editor campaign?
- **Online media:** Integrating your online strategy with your larger strategy seems obvious, but sometimes the rapid pace of the online world can make that difficult. Having clear audience priorities permits more straightforward day-to-day decision-making about how to use your social media bandwidth. With almost limitless choices of content to share and retweet, knowing your audience and how you hope to persuade them will help guide your decisions.
- **Other outreach strategies:** Media—both traditional and new—are only one type of avenue for reaching your target audiences. Make sure your communications strategy encompasses the full range of your activities, such as organizing, coalition work, speech opportunities, and the like. If your target audience is a policymaker, consider how you may gain direct access to him or her.

- * **Spokespeople.** Identify spokespeople and allies your target audiences trust and listen to. Determine who of those people you can activate, particularly if you don't currently have direct access to your targets.

CREATE AN
OUTREACH STRATEGY

STRATEGY

FOR MORE IDEAS ABOUT:

Tips on working with the media:	31
Identifying spokespeople:	32

Step 6: Integrate and Implement.

Your communications strategy must be an integral part of your larger effort. Advocacy, organizing, litigation, and other tactics should incorporate the audiences, messages, and spokespeople that you identified in your communications planning.

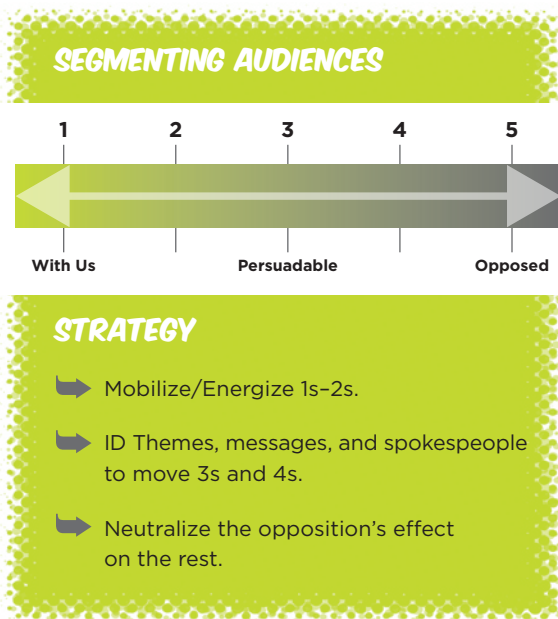
Step 7: Implement and Evaluate.

Evaluation should be an ongoing part of any strategy. A constant check-in on your progress will alert you to needed adjustments regarding tactics, strategies, even goals. If something's not working, it's really not worth continuing unmodified.



AUDIENCE SEGMENTATION

Remember that there's no "general public" when it comes to communications strategy. None of us have the resources to reach everyone, and fortunately, we don't have to. Typically, we need to reach a much smaller group of decision makers—swing voters, policymakers, corporate board members—and a segment of people who influence them, such as faith leaders, donors, or customers. Think of audiences on a scale from 1 to 5, with the 1s being the most sympathetic and activated and the 5s the most hostile and activated against your cause. Now segment—who are the 2s and 3s? How can you reach them? And how can you motivate the 1s to action?



Audience Segments

Base. These are the folks who are already “with you” but need engagement to stay motivated and active. The communications strategy for this group should be closely aligned to any organizing strategies your organization may have as well as membership and coalition-building efforts.

Persuadables. Identified through public opinion research, experience, and partner conversations, among other tactics, these are groups that could be with you with the right motivation. It's important that your messages to these groups serve both short- and long-term goals. Ideally, you want to bring them along for the long haul, not just one specific campaign.

Opposition. This group is highly unlikely to be inspired to join you. Your strategy should be to neutralize the effect they have on persuadable audiences. By and large, you should not spend resources trying to influence this group.

Decision makers. This group often holds the key to the realization of your policy goals. In an ideal world, they'd be part of your base or your persuadables. In those cases, it's your job to find the messages that motivate them toward fulfilling a specific “ask.” In some instances, key decision makers are most accurately described as your opposition. In those cases, you need specific strategies to find enough shared interests and values to move them. Sometimes this can be done through influencers.

Influencers. These are the people and institutions to whom your decision makers are responsive. They may have moral authority, such as resides with faith leaders and congregations; they may have persuasive force, as editorial boards do; or they may have a direct relationship, as do customers or donors. Your task with influencers is to motivate them to move the decision makers in your direction or to move decision makers to whom you may not have direct access.

PUBLIC OPINION

PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH: GAUGING YOUR AUDIENCES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR MOVING THEM

Public opinion research is a key component of any communications strategy. It's crucial to know as much as possible about how your audience is thinking about an issue. We recommend using public opinion not only to gauge where audiences stand now, but also to determine how to move them to a more positive point of view and to action over the short and long term. Moving them on a specific issue for a specific campaign is important, but messaging that solely relies on this approach can often clash with longer-term goals.

Depending on your budget, opinion research techniques can range from informal discussions to focus groups or large national surveys.

Types of public opinion research

QUALITATIVE

Focus groups, one-on-one interviews, content analysis, dial testing

Good for:

- * getting a sense of how specific audiences are currently thinking and talking about an issue—values, vocabulary, themes, metaphors—and why
- * testing out message ideas and themes
- * informing the design of polling questions

QUANTITATIVE

Survey (phone, mail, online, mobile)

Good for:

- * extrapolating to the population at large
- * measuring attitude changes over time
- * testing the effects of different messages
- * identifying and comparing audiences

RESEARCH

MEDIA

It's important to be familiar with public conversations on issues as well as trends. Understanding how the media cover our issues is one important way to know what different audiences are hearing about them and in what terms.

Media tracking

There are a number of ways to track your issue in the media, from sophisticated services that provide metrics and transcripts to simple Google keyword alerts that will let you know which outlets have produced content using your search terms. The goal of your tracking should be to identify which media cover your issues most and whether your issue is making it into the media that reach your target audiences. From this information you can build media lists, identify sympathetic reporters, and gather articles for analysis (below).

Media analysis

While media tracking is ongoing, media analysis usually happens at regular intervals throughout your campaign. Analyzing media coverage involves reviewing a random sample of articles or shows that have covered your issue in some way over a specific time period. The dominant frames and arguments, the most prominent spokespeople and storylines, op-eds and editorial positions, all help to define the public discourse. At the beginning of a campaign or initiative, it's important to gauge how your issue is being covered and your best opportunities for media outreach. Later, analysis will help you determine whether you've been successful in influencing coverage or if trends have changed in ways that your messaging should address.

FIELD

The values and priorities of the field of advocates, activists, organizers, allies, and those most directly affected by an issue must inform communications strategy. We should never ask people to say things that their values do not support. Identifying the major points of agreement, disagreement, shared values, and common themes helps in prioritizing audiences, narratives, and solutions.

How to get the information:

- * interviews with the field
- * surveys
- * guided discussion groups

CASE STUDY

PERCEPTIONS AND MEDIA COVERAGE OF BLACK MEN AND BOYS

In 2011, The Opportunity Agenda conducted three research studies that examined perceptions of and by African-American men and boys and their relationship to the media. Among the many factors that influence the opportunities and achievements of black men and boys are public perceptions and attitudes toward them as a group, as well as their own self-perceptions. One of the most important avenues for maintaining—or changing—these perceptions is the mass media, with its significant power to shape popular ideas and attitudes.

To inform the communications efforts of those seeking to improve opportunity for black males around the country we commissioned the following:

- ➔ a review of the social and cognitive science literature to highlight what researchers have learned about the relationship between media representations and the media's impacts on the lives of black men and boys;
- ➔ an analysis of existing research on attitudes of and about black men and boys; and
- ➔ an analysis of original data about black men as consumers of media, including broadcast, print, and online platforms.

The research¹ revealed important trends, including the over-representation of black males in media depictions of violence, crime, and poverty, as well as the lack of depictions of the systemic barriers facing members of this group. The research also shows that distorted media representations can have an impact on perceptions and attitudes toward African-American males and affect many aspects of their lives, from receiving harsher sentencing by judges to having a lower likelihood than whites of being hired for a job and admitted to school despite equal qualifications. But distorted media depictions can also affect African-American males' self-perceptions and lead to diminished self-esteem and lower performance in cognitive contexts, among other detrimental effects. Frequently, black men are their own harshest critics.

The research findings and recommendations have informed a communications strategy that includes meetings with media decision makers and creative, media literacy efforts, and message development.

¹ The research, which was authored by Topos Partnership (Executive Summary, Social Science Literature Review, and the Review of Public Opinion Research) and Marc Kerschhagel (Media Market Research), is available at www.opportunityagenda.org/black_male.

THE OPPORTUNITY STORY

Research and experience across a wide range of social justice efforts point to several core principles for moving audiences and inspiring action. On most issues, we recommend a compelling “Opportunity Story” that embodies these principles by:

- * leading with shared values
- * promoting solutions
- * evoking familiar themes and metaphors
- * telling a systemic story

That story should inform not only individual messages, but also broader narratives that bridge individual audiences and campaigns. We describe the elements of the Opportunity Story, and the notion of a narrative, in the pages that follow.

The ideal of opportunity represents *specific positive values* that we must reinvigorate. Opportunity means that everyone has a fair chance to achieve his or her full potential as a human being. It means equal treatment, economic security and mobility, a voice in decisions that affect us, a chance to start over after missteps or misfortune, and a sense of responsibility toward each other as a people. Upholding these values is not just good policy; it is among our inalienable human rights. Our government and institutions, as well as individuals, have an important responsibility to protect and expand opportunity for this and future generations.

Evoking the narrative of American opportunity does not mean appealing to blind nationalism or ignoring what happens outside our borders. Rather, it means understanding that most Americans simultaneously hold in their minds great hope and pride about what our country has to offer and real disappointment about what we’ve failed to do as a nation. Addressing both sets of beliefs is important to engage people in supporting change.

NARRATIVE

FRAMING, MESSAGING, AND NARRATIVE

After determining communications goals that map onto larger organizational priorities and identifying and prioritizing audiences, we must begin framing issues, developing narratives, and creating messages to move those audiences. For purposes of this toolkit, we are relying on specific definitions of these terms.

FRAMING is the identification of a set of values and themes within which we will present our issue. Because there are usually many ways to think about and talk about each issue we work on, it's important to be strategic in the way we present our story to audiences. This means carefully considering the way we start the story—what values, ideas, or familiar stories are we evoking? How will we lead them to the solutions we want? Who are the heroes and villains of our story?

NARRATIVE refers to the set of frames we use to tell the story of a specific issue. By identifying overarching key themes and values we want our audiences to identify with an issue, we can help to ensure a level of resonance and consistency that won't happen if we frame each sub-issue independently of a larger theme.

MESSAGES are developed for a specific opportunity and should be tailored according to medium, venue, and audience. While messages will fit within our larger frame, and reflect an issue's narrative, they will vary in tone, vocabulary, length, and other considerations.

LEADING WITH VALUES

Whether we're rallying the base or persuading the undecided, shared values are almost always the place to start. That doesn't mean being preachy or high-handed, but rather reminding audiences why our efforts matter and are worthy of believing in.

Communications research shows that audiences are more receptive to unfamiliar arguments when they are framed by shared values. If we present only a litany of facts and rhetoric that conflict, or appear to conflict, with an audience's core values, they will often disregard the facts. What's more, many audiences are less familiar with the details of controversies and policies than we are, which means we can quickly lose them. It is therefore important to connect arguments to universal values that we all care about.

For example, in talking about equal opportunity in higher education, diving straight into the details of affirmative action admission policies triggers for many the notion of "quotas" or "preferential treatment." For others "affirmative action" is a jargon term that holds little meaning at all. Moving to the level of talking about issues and talking about access to higher education is slightly more engaging to audiences, but can also cause them to associate with values like personal success or competition. However, if we start the conversation with the value of equal opportunity for all and the importance of diversity to a 21st century education, we've engaged a different part of audiences' minds and thinking. Starting at the aspirational level of shared values and a positive vision, we can then work through the conversation, leading audiences to why removing barriers to equal opportunity is important and why affirmative action policies are necessary.

FRAMING: LEADING WITH VALUES CHANGING HEARTS, THEN MINDS AND POLICY

On a range of issues, we recommend leading with values rooted in Opportunity, the ideal that everyone deserves a fair chance to achieve his or her full potential. Opportunity values include:

- ➔ **EQUALITY** - *The benefits and burdens of society should not depend on what we look like or where we come from. Equality means celebrating our differences while challenging stereotypes and breaking down barriers.*
- ➔ **MOBILITY** - *Where we start out in life should not determine where we end up. Inherent in mobility is the belief that everyone who works hard should be able to advance and participate fully in society.*
- ➔ **VOICE** - *We should all have a say in the decisions that affect us. Our voices must be heard in voting booths, at public forums, and across the media.*
- ➔ **REDEMPTION** - *We all grow and change over time and need a chance to start over when things go wrong. To foster redemption, we must provide conditions that allow people to develop, to rebuild, and to reclaim full responsibility for their lives.*
- ➔ **COMMUNITY** - *We share responsibility for each other and for the common good; the strength of our nation depends on the vibrancy and cohesiveness of our diverse population.*
- ➔ **SECURITY** - *We should all have the tools to meet our own basic needs and the needs of our families. Without economic and social security, it is impossible to access the other rights and responsibilities society has to offer.*

These values are part of our **human rights**, the rights we all have simply by virtue of our humanity. As the founders of our nation recognized when they declared that we are all created equal, fulfilling our unalienable human rights is essential to realizing the American promise of opportunity for all. Read more about how to talk about these values on our website at www.opportunityagenda.org.

PROPOSING POSITIVE SOLUTIONS

Point audiences toward clear solutions

Emphasizing solutions taps into Americans' pride and counters "compassion fatigue," in which people see a parade of social problems as impossible to solve. We have to be *for* something positive, not just *against* harms and threats.

FRAMING, MESSAGING, AND NARRATIVE

For example, Americans agree that racial profiling is wrong but question whether anything can be done about it and therefore whether opposing it is worth their time or mental energy. Combining the condemnation of bad practices with a call for reforms like officer training, clear rules, and measures for accountability highlights a positive way forward and empowers audiences to act.

Similarly, many persuadable audiences believe that detaining and deporting immigrants for low-level crimes is not the best use of government resources. However, they also want solutions to what they consider to be a problem: undocumented workers. In this case, criticizing harsh immigration enforcement policies is not enough. That criticism must be paired with calls for federal immigration policy reform that provides a roadmap to citizenship for those who are here without official immigration status.

EVOKING FAMILIAR THEMES

We all connect new information and ideas to familiar stories, metaphors, or concepts that we already understand. Effective framing directs people to stories that will help them understand the idea we're introducing, tapping helpful themes and metaphors. For instance, using the value of opportunity connects people quickly to the long-held notion of America as a land of opportunity, a place where anyone can reach his or her full potential. Absent proper framing, audiences often default to unhelpful themes such as extreme individualism or ineffective government.

We need to choose and evoke metaphors carefully. We should ask what solutions each metaphor implies and who it suggests is responsible for addressing the problem at hand. Consider, for example, the metaphor of a "level playing field." This metaphor reflects the notion not only of fairness, but also of competition between opposing teams. That can actually undermine support for a more equitable and inclusive health care or public education system, where we instead want to elevate the values of community, cooperation, and the common good. Metaphors like toppling barriers to opportunity, investing in our future, and maintaining the public structures that keep us safe can tell a more helpful story.

TELLING AN AFFIRMATIVE STORY

We're all faced with misleading, inaccurate, and untruthful statements about our issues. And we certainly can't allow misinformation to go unchallenged. But the best way to counter false information is to tell our affirmative story in ways that overcome the other side's falsehoods. By contrast, we should avoid myth-busting, or restating the false argument and then explaining why it's wrong. Research and experience show that this only results in deepening the myth in our audiences' minds. The better approach is to proactively tell our own story.

INSTEAD OF:

There's a myth that affirmative action results in unqualified students being admitted to schools they're not prepared for, but let me explain why that's just a myth.

TRY:

Affirmative action helps to maintain visibly open pathways to opportunity for well-qualified students from a range of backgrounds. We know it works because of the improved success of all students who've benefitted from diverse classrooms and campuses.

INSTEAD OF:

Myth: Immigrants don't pay taxes. Fact: All immigrants pay taxes, whether income, property, sales, or other.

TRY:

Immigrants are significant contributors to our economy, both as consumers and taxpayers, through sales, property, income, and other taxes.

TELLING STORIES IN A BROADER CONTEXT

Many stories focus on the plights of individuals. It's an easy and often compelling way to make a point about a certain issues. But research shows that an exclusive focus on such stories inadvertently suggests to audiences that people should solve the bulk of their problems themselves, without outside intervention or support. Instead of an inclusive health care system, for instance, an individual approach suggests we should have individual health savings accounts or simply diet and exercise more. By contrast, placing human stories in a broader context—patients who challenged their insurance company, a doctor who sees her patients having to forgo treatment—connects our audience to systemic problems and solutions.

So we need to tell real stories designed to convey *systemic* problems and societal and policy solutions—for example, telling the story of health care workers or job trainers working to expand opportunity for all, or showing similarly situated yet diverse groups of people (e.g., farm workers, students, domestic workers, asthma patients) facing vastly different opportunities because of different policies or societal responses. The more we can connect the dots—between individual stories and the big-picture solution, and between all of our groups and issues—the better we can create broad-based, long-term narratives that point audiences toward the range of solutions that will support our overarching vision for the future.



FRAMING, MESSAGING, AND NARRATIVE

INDIVIDUAL STORIES THAT SUPPORT SYSTEMIC SOLUTIONS

THE ENLIGHTENED INSIDER – someone who has spent time within the system that you want to change, recognized its faults, and is willing to speak about this. For example, this person could be a former immigration agent who can speak to the flaws in policy and their impact on immigrants and citizens alike, or a real estate agent who's seen housing discrimination up close and on a mass scale.

THE AFFECTED CHANGE AGENT – someone directly affected by the flawed system and who took action to change it. It's important that this person's success was related to changing a system, a policy, an entire way of thinking—and not just successful for their own individual gain. For example, she may have been a public housing tenant who organized and motivated a group of neighbors to demand better oversight of the property, or a parent who mobilized the PTA to challenge overly harsh disciplinary policies.

EXPERTS – someone to provide the big picture, the statistics, and studies that show how this issue affects the whole community and who can make the point that the issue must be solved at the policy, not individual, level. These spokespeople (researchers, advocates, policymakers, and others) frequently offer a transition from problem to solution.

SHOWING HOW WE'RE ALL IN IT TOGETHER

In messaging, we should also emphasize that the issues we're discussing affect all of us. They are about our shared destiny and the forces—good and bad—that connect us. Doing this opens up new conversations and moves us toward hope and away from harmful framing of social justice issues in terms of extreme individualism, competition, and blame. This might mean, for example, showing how fair treatment of immigrants is about protecting due process for everyone.

BUILDING SHARED NARRATIVES

Narratives are broad stories that transcend any individual argument, statistic, or legislative battle to tap into our most deeply held values and assumptions. A narrative tells the story of an issue in a way that is immediately accessible to target audiences and points them toward the solutions we want to promote. Once established in the public consciousness, a narrative can have a profound impact on the policy process. For instance, the “free

market” narrative (markets are rational and should not be tampered with) has been employed by conservatives to great effect in debates over taxes, financial regulation, and social services, providing a simple explanation that applies across issue areas. In debates over the death penalty, a narrative around innocence (that using capital punishment risks executing innocent people in the name of the state) has helped to roll back the death penalty in a growing number of states. Other powerful narratives have included “family values” and “big government,” as well as “civil rights” and the “New Deal.”

CASE STUDY: IMMIGRATION

In 2006, The Opportunity Agenda completed the first in a series of media analyses on media coverage of immigration issues. We found that anti-immigrant voices not only outnumbered pro-immigrant voices in the media, but they also reflected a consistent set of themes, regardless of their specific message or audience. Whether they were talking to conservatives about our borders or to progressives about low-wage workers, they relied on two main narrative themes: that immigrants are a threat to law and order, and that they overwhelm the country’s scarce resources. At the same time, we found that pro-immigrant spokespeople had a tendency to communicate an assortment of policy- or campaign-specific messages, with little connection in terms of theme or story.

Together with a cadre of national and regional partners, we set about addressing this, naming the effort “narrative development.” We spend the first half of 2007 reviewing public opinion research, interviewing those in the field, and monitoring media coverage. By the middle of the year, the group had settled on three main themes that together would form a pro-immigrant narrative: Upholding our Nation’s Values, Workable Solutions, and Moving Forward Together. These themes, working together, would tell a story of broader community, systemic-level solutions that were inclusive and participatory, and most importantly, of preserving and protecting our national values of opportunity, equality, and community, as well as human rights.

In the years since the development of the narrative, we have seen not only greater cohesion in pro-immigrant voices, but also improvements in media coverage, in public perceptions, and increasingly, in policy debates. A 2010 media analysis found that the themes of the narrative had penetrated the media discourse, that coverage was increasingly positive, and that pro-immigrant voices were outnumbering opponents. Public attitudes toward citizenship for undocumented immigrants remained largely supportive despite high unemployment rates, and support for undocumented young people increased. And after several years of policy defeats, 2012 marked a shift away from harsh enforcement laws and back toward more constructive approaches. Gains have also included a series of pro-immigrant laws passed in California and explicit use of the narrative language in legislation proposed in Nebraska.

Recent public opinion research has further underscored the need for a strong, values-based narrative, finding persuadable audiences best moved by discussions of the values and positive solutions the narrative promotes.

FRAMING, MESSAGING, AND NARRATIVE

MESSAGING

The communications principles that we've covered, like framing, narrative, leading with values, and highlighting solutions, come together in developing specific messages for particular issues and audiences.

Building a Message:

VALUE, PROBLEM, SOLUTION, **ACTION!**

To introduce people to a new way of thinking about an issue, it's important to carefully consider the structure of our messages—particularly how they begin. We suggest you build messages using the following structure.

- * **Lead with values and vision.** Starting with shared values helps audiences to “hear” our messages more effectively than do dry facts or emotional rhetoric.
- * **Then introduce the problem.** Frame problems as a threat to our vision and values. This is the place to pull out stories and statistics that are likely to resonate with the target audience. Where possible, include the cause of the problem as well as who is responsible for fixing it.
 - **Frame problems as threats to shared values.** For example, limiting voting rights is a threat to equality and voice. Our flawed immigration policies are threats to opportunity, equality, and community. Eliminating affirmative action policies is a threat to equal opportunity.
 - **Choose facts carefully.** We all have a lot of evidence to support our claims. However, facts do not tend to change minds if the facts are not couched in values. After priming audiences with values, present one or two pieces of evidence that make your case. Break facts and statistics down to manageable pieces of information, such as stories that people can digest.
- * **Pivot quickly to solutions.** Positive solutions leave people with choices, ideas, and motivation. Assign responsibility—who can enact this solution?
 - Make sure your solution fits the problem you have posed. For example, if you have painted a picture of harsh conditions on the U.S.–Mexico border and the resulting migrant deaths that occur there, federal immigration policy reform may not sound like the right solution to your audiences. You will need to connect more dots to get your audiences to your policy solutions.
- * **Assign an action.** What can this specific target audience do? Try to give them something concrete, that they can even picture themselves doing: making a phone call, sending an email. Steer clear of vague “learn more” messages, when possible.

BUILDING

RACIAL PROFILING VALUE

To work for all of us, our justice system depends on equal treatment and investigations based on evidence, not stereotypes or bias.

PROBLEM

But, too often, police departments use racial profiling, which is singling people out because of their race or accent, instead of evidence of wrongdoing. That's against our national values, endangers our young people, and reduces public safety.

SOLUTION

Law enforcement officers need clear rules and proper training to avoid racial profiling and to focus on evidence and public safety.

ACTION!

Tell your member of Congress to pass the End Racial Profiling Act and to support proper training and rules for police departments.

HOME OPPORTUNITY VALUE

Access to an affordable home in a good neighborhood is critical to the American promise of opportunity and to our nation's economic security.

PROBLEM

But misconduct by the lending industry and inadequate rules and enforcement helped to wreck our economy and deny that promise to millions of Americans.

SOLUTION

Fortunately, solutions exist that can prevent further foreclosures and restore the American Dream. They include steps like mandatory mediation, reducing loan principal to fair market rates, and ensuring that reforms of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac keep sustainable homeownership available to working Americans.

ACTION!

Tell the White House to endorse and implement the Compact for Home Opportunity.

A MESSAGE

FRAMING, MESSAGING, AND NARRATIVE

IMMIGRATION VALUE

When it comes to immigration, we need commonsense approaches that uphold our nation's values and move us forward together. We need a system that's fair and effective for everyone. But our current immigration laws are badly broken.

PROBLEM

There is no roadmap to citizenship for aspiring Americans, including talented students and U.S. soldiers who were brought here as young children. And wrongheaded laws in places like Arizona and Alabama are ignoring basic American principles of due process and fairness.

SOLUTION

Congress and the President should act today to adopt a roadmap to citizenship and to ensure human rights protections for everyone in our country.

ACTION!

Call your representatives and senators and tell them that this country needs a modern, reasonable immigration process.



TIPS FOR WORKING WITH CREATIVES

In introducing the superhero **HELVETIKA BOLD** in the following comic book excerpt, we are instilling a creative element in this toolkit. Working with *New York Times* bestselling author and artist Gan Golan, we endeavored to develop a character that could not only bring to life some of the principles we are trying to communicate in this publication.

We did this because we believe that the fields of advocacy and art can and should work for even more intentional alignment and alliances. Socially engaged artists, media makers, and cultural organizations play a vital role in building the national will for equal and greater opportunity in America. The spectrum of creativity, from grassroots to Hollywood and from campaign-driven expression to “art for art’s sake,” each have the potential to move hearts and minds, break down prejudice, inspire citizen engagement, catalyze action, and in the long term, encourage public support for systemic change.

For social change advocates wishing to begin or increase their work with the creative sector, we offer these **seven suggestions**.

- 1. Allow Artists to Lead the Creative Process.** Although partnerships between artists and organizations are important, artists should lead when it comes to the creative concepts, or the results may be just flat-out bad art or, at best, a “pretty” version of campaign talking points.
- 2. Develop Authentic Partnerships for Effective Collaborations.** For effective collaborations to flourish, it is critical to develop a culture of genuine partnership and reciprocity between professional advocates and artists, as opposed to the impulse to “use” or “harness” artists for campaign purposes. We are all much better off when artists—experts at “sideways thinking”—are involved with developing strategy from the ground up.
- 3. Embrace Contradiction.** There are false choices between art that is accompanied by express calls to actions (“sign this petition”) and a softer, long-term “hearts and minds” approach. We believe that each can play a critical role in the ecosystem for social change. From our perspective, the answer is usually “both... and” rather than “either...or.”

CREATIVE WORK

- 4. Understand the Nuances of Working with Celebrities.** As a result of their public profile, celebrities, including actors and musicians, have a unique ability to draw attention to, raise funds for, and shift public opinion on important issues. But there are risks. Partnerships with celebrities must be clearly defined, authentic to and customized for who they are as a person, and nurtured for the long term, as with any important stakeholder.
- 5. Connectors are Important to the Social Change Puzzle.** Connectors are people who are “bilingual” in art and advocacy and can link the right artist with the right campaign to catalyze collaborations that make an impact. Organizations should consider ways to partner with connectors including hiring consultants, engaging a creative fellow, or creating a staff position to further integrate cultural strategies into their organization’s work.
- 6. Maximize Impact.** Effective cultural strategies reach the largest possible number of people; amplify creative work that has already been done; target communities that are intrinsically diverse (music, sports), opening up movements and campaigns to persuadables; tie local events to national advocacy efforts; and build long-term engagement with audiences, old and new, by creating opportunities to stay involved, stay in touch, and take action.
- 7. Match the Medium.** Different types of art maximize different impacts. Comedy can allow the safe exploration of taboo subjects and film can humanize its subjects and create intense emotional connections. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of different forms, and matching them appropriately to a specific strategic goal, is an important part of successful engagement.

MAXIMIZE
IMPACT

WORKING WITH REPORTERS

- * **Reporters need information and often do not have much time to find it.** Make yourself—and any reports, statistics, and spokespeople you have—available on a regular basis. However, it's also important not to bombard reporters with a series of non-newsworthy press releases. Save specific press materials for newsworthy events, but do familiarize reporters with the types of resources you are able to offer them.
- * **Be a consumer of the media.** Have a good idea of what might interest the media generally or reporters you are targeting specifically. Different reporters and outlets have different needs and will often require a distinct angle, spokesperson, or news hook for a successful pitch. In addition, reporters like to know that those pitching them are familiar with their work and interests and will appreciate a tailored approach.
- * **The goal is persuasion, not just publicity.** Although earning publicity is an obvious and crucial goal in any communications plan, it should not be at the expense of communicating the right message. Reporters may be eager to cover aspects of your issue that clash with the narrative you are trying to promote. Evaluate requests carefully to determine whether you will at least have an opportunity to frame the story in a way that highlights the solutions you are seeking. While you may sometimes talk to reporters largely to develop relationships for the future, be sure to “do no harm” to your short- and long-term goals. Remember that your ultimate audience is not the reporter but those that his or her reporting will reach.
- * **Staying on message is not easy and requires practice.** Have the basic points that you want to convey in front of you during the interview (remember Value, Problem, Solution, and Action), and keep them as simple as possible. Everyone in your organization who speaks with the media should have at least basic media training where feasible. That's a must, especially for interviews that could turn hostile.
- * **Know that nothing is off-the-record.** In interviews, stick to your main points and don't let reporters sidetrack you. This includes any time you communicate with them before and after the actual interview as well—they can use anything you tell them. Unless you have a very close and trusted relationship with a reporter, stay on the record.
- * **Pivot.** You can move from the question a reporter asks to the question you want to answer by pivoting. Give a short, non-interesting answer to the initial question and quickly move to “What's really important about this issue is,” or “I'm really here to talk about how we can grow opportunity in this community.”

PIVOT

MEDIA

CHOOSING SPOKESPEOPLE

Busy reporters rushing against deadline tend to go with the spokesperson you pitch to them. Those spokespersons should embody your narrative, including the values and human consequences at stake, the hard facts and statistics, and the systemic problems and solutions. They should include people with whom your audiences can identify and, where possible, some unexpected voices. In a way, it's like casting a blockbuster movie: the larger story should drive your individual decisions.

- * **Look outside the management team.** In many organizations, the executive director and key staff are responsible for being spokespersons. This is not always the best choice. Choose your spokespersons based on how appealing to and effective with media they are rather than on their seniority.
- * **Look outside your organization.** It's important that the voice of people directly affected by the issue are included in the media. Community spokespersons represent “real people.” Choose members of the affected community who can speak with authority, who audiences will easily respect, and who can powerfully present the issue in terms of institutions and broad themes, not just in terms of isolated negative personal impacts.
- * **Look outside your issue.** People not typically associated with your campaign can often validate your position with new audiences. They can also broaden the frame. For example, having law enforcement officers speak on behalf of convicted juveniles seeking fair sentencing conveys a message from those regarded as “tough on crime” calling for reform that opponents might otherwise frame as being “soft on crime.” Another example would be to have local leaders, such as firefighters or schoolteachers, speak out on abuses against immigrants.
- * **Look the part.** Remember the blockbuster movie analogy; if your story includes farmers talking about migrant labor, they should dress like farmers, not business people. If your spokespersons are police officers, they should—to the extent that departmental rules allow—speak to the press in uniform. Similarly, the setting for a press briefing or event should match the story you want to tell.
- * **Give them the tools they need to stay on message.** It might be helpful to conduct practice interviews with each of your spokespersons, finding where common themes intersect and if your narrative can be heard in what they say. This could help you strengthen your own talking points and begin to collect sound bites for press releases and pitch letters that you will send to editors and reporters.

PRESS RELEASES

Press releases are more than an opportunity to publicize an event or report. They are also messaging vehicles. Although the main text of the release should be primarily factual, you have a lot of room in the quotes you provide for framing the issue and promoting your narrative.

Typically, press releases are written in the style of a basic news story. These feature the “who, what, when, and where” of the story early in the copy. The “why” can be supplied in the form of a quote from the spokesperson of your organization. Releases should be reasonably short and make the case for the newsworthiness of the story. Be sure to include contact information on every page.

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Alabama Copycat Bill Hits Road Block — Legislators Respond to Public Outcry Against HB 2191

February 17, 2012

Contact: Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition

NASHVILLE - House Bill 2191, the controversial bill that would make driving a car with an undocumented immigrant passenger a felony, was taken off notice by the House Judiciary committee this morning. In the last week, Tennesseans have flooded representatives with phone calls and emails opposing the measure after seeing it advance through the Judiciary subcommittee. The bill is almost an exact replica of a provision from Alabama’s sweeping anti-immigrant law, and a study released late last week by the University of Alabama indicates that the Alabama law has already cost the state up to \$10.8 billion.

The following is a statement from Stephen Fotopulos, Executive Director of the Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition: “Today’s committee decision is a good sign that the legislature sees the value in maintaining Tennessee’s reputation as a welcoming and inclusive place to live. We are encouraged that Tennessee lawmakers are also recognizing the need to keep safe distance from Alabama’s failed immigration experiment. The broad and effective opposition to Shipley’s bill should serve as a flashing caution sign to other state lawmakers planning to divert scarce legislative resources with costly, anti-immigrant proposals.”

...

MEDIA

WRITING AN OP-ED

Op-eds are your chance to speak through the news media directly to policymakers, your constituents, and other target audiences. Papers will run op-eds from a range of sources, including experts, community voices, advocates, and those directly affected by issues. It is important for you to make the case as to why your voice should be included, providing biographical information and credentials and a persuasive argument about why your point of view is timely. The Value, Problem, Solution, Action formulation can also be helpful in drafting a persuasive op-ed.

Check the paper's guidelines. Outlets usually include op-ed guidelines on their websites, including information about desired length and how to submit. It is important to follow their guidelines closely, to avoid the risk of rejection over technicalities and unwarranted editing due to length.

Below is an op-ed by The Opportunity Agenda's Executive Director Alan Jenkins, along with annotation on the communications choices it reflects.

Dallas Morning News

Op-ed: Media distortions and the Trayvon Martin case

By Alan Jenkins

March 29, 2012

The mainstream media have played a mostly positive role in covering the tragic and senseless killing of Trayvon Martin, the unarmed 17-year-old African-American boy shot to death by a neighborhood watch volunteer in Sanford, Florida. After a slow start, reporters have uncovered new facts and asked tough questions.

To their credit, the media have largely covered Trayvon's grieving and outraged parents with the dignity and humanity they deserve. They have also interviewed community residents, largely white, who have spoken out with grief and outrage over the incident.

A TIMELY INTRO. Draw the reader in with a reference to current events, a quick anecdote or metaphor that helps set the stage for the point you want to make.

SHARED VALUES. Here Jenkins leads with the common human experience of loss and the value of dignity with which we all want to be treated.

But the media, both news and popular, have also had a hand in creating the mind-set that leads to tragedies like this one, based on the facts currently available. A new report by The Opportunity Agenda reviewing a decade of research finds that media depictions of black men and boys are too frequently distorted in ways that reinforce negative stereotypes and lead to discriminatory treatment.

FRAME THE PROBLEM AS A THREAT TO VALUES. A lack of human and dignified treatment of black men and boys is the problem here.

Those distorted depictions occur across almost all types of media, including news reporting, entertainment, advertising, and even video games. Repeated unbalanced media portrayals of black men and boys, the report finds, contribute to distorted perceptions, antagonism, and discriminatory treatment. They increase public support for punitive approaches to issues involving black males and increase public tolerance of racial inequality.

A CENTRAL THESIS. State your central point clearly and focus all supporting evidence on further illuminating it.

In particular, black men and boys are disproportionately depicted in news media as perpetrators of violent crime, when compared with actual arrest rates. They are underrepresented in the more sympathetic roles of victim and law enforcement officers.

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE. The rule of threes applies to your supporting evidence, try to use three compelling examples, statistics, or anecdotes best supporting the thesis.

... [Excerpted]

To be sure, the mass media are not the only factor that shapes people's conscious and subconscious beliefs and biases. But decades of research make clear that distorted media depictions persist and are among the contributing factors to tragedies like the one in Florida.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE OPPOSITION. A good tactic in outlining your argument is to acknowledge the main opposing argument to your point, thus addressing questions that may be running through the reader's mind.

Fortunately, the mass media can also be part of the solution. Of course, the responsibility is not the media's alone. But the media, as the public looking glass, can and should show the full spectrum of the lives of black men and boys. Media biases and their effects neither absolve nor convict George Zimmerman, who should answer to the legal system. But for most people, having the full picture will result in greater knowledge and fewer irrational fears of innocent black teenagers like Trayvon Martin.

SOLUTION. Be sure to identify the steps that are needed to address the problem you describe and who should take those steps.

CLOSING. Leave the reader with something to ponder while reiterating your point one final time. It should be noted that the inclusion of forceful and creative introductions and closings should not preclude your main point. If a metaphor is too difficult to follow, or an anecdote focuses readers' attention on its details, your point is likely to be lost.

For full text: <http://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/latest-columns/20120329-alan-jenkins-media-distortions-and-the-trayvon-martin-case.ece>

MEDIA

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor are a quick and effective way to weigh in on issues that media frequently cover. Often, more people read the letters page than the pages where the original article appeared. Almost any story can generate a letter to the editor; the key is to make sure that you use the opportunity to get the right messages in front of the right audience. As with any outreach tactic, letters to the editor offer a chance to advance your larger strategy, not just a chance to get into print. Below is an example of a letter published in the *New York Times* by Policy-Link founder Angela Glover Blackwell, along with some tips on how to create a successful letter.

Invitation to a Dialogue: Moving Up in America

Published: January 10, 2012

Re: "Harder for Americans to Rise From Economy's Lower Rungs" (front page Jan. 5):

America's stalled mobility is not only disheartening — it also challenges our sense of national identity and is a threat to economic prosperity. The Horatio Alger ideal that someone born poor can through hard work become rich is the quintessential American promise. But for the most part it is a pipe dream. The same Pew study cited in the article shows that in the last generation only about **6 out of 100** poor children actually struck it big.

REFERENCE THE ORIGINAL PIECE. Letters are typically a reaction to a specific article and should reference it, including the headline and date. If the headline contains harmful frames and vocabulary that you don't want to repeat, just refer to the story's author and the date it ran.

LEAD WITH VALUES. The Value, Problem, Solution, Action formulation can be an effective structure for creating an effective and succinct letter to the editor. Here, Blackwell starts with the value of mobility and frames the problem as a threat to that deeply held American value.

“Movin’ on up” is especially hard for children born poor and black or poor and female. Black children of poor parents are half as likely as their white counterparts to become rich. They also face a much greater risk of slipping down the economic ladder: 45 percent of black children of solidly middle-income parents ended up poor compared with 16 percent of white children. And despite the enormous strides women have made in the world of work, daughters of poor families were more likely to remain poor than sons (47 and 35 percent, respectively). Education and the neighborhood where a child grows up play a huge role in determining economic success, as does family background.

CHOOSE YOUR POINTS CAREFULLY.

Blackwell quickly introduces a few key societal factors that can cause the problem she has outlined. She uses strategically chosen facts to make her point that threats to mobility are often about more than class, and in fact affect middle-class communities of color more frequently than white communities.

Knowing that you have limited space in a letter to the editor, it’s important to ensure that every fact and argument is essential to building to your final ask.

What can be done? We must strengthen community colleges where most poor children who get an education beyond high school do so; encourage partnerships between employers and community colleges; and improve economic opportunities in poor neighborhoods.

SET THE RIGHT TONE. It’s important to be strategic about the tone of your letter. Here, Blackwell strikes a measured tone that is more likely to have an impact with persuadable audiences. Picture your target audience and gauge their likely knowledge of the issue. Write the letter with them in mind.

To improve mobility we must get the American jobs machine working again creating the middle-class jobs that are the foundation of our nation’s greatness.

ALWAYS INCLUDE SOLUTIONS. Here the author leaves readers with a positive, proactive idea for addressing the threats to mobility she has laid out, from concrete ideas about community colleges to a broader call for better middle class jobs.

ANGELA GLOVER BLACKWELL Oakland, Calif. The writer is the founder and chief executive of PolicyLink, a nonprofit research and action institute that advances economic and social equity.

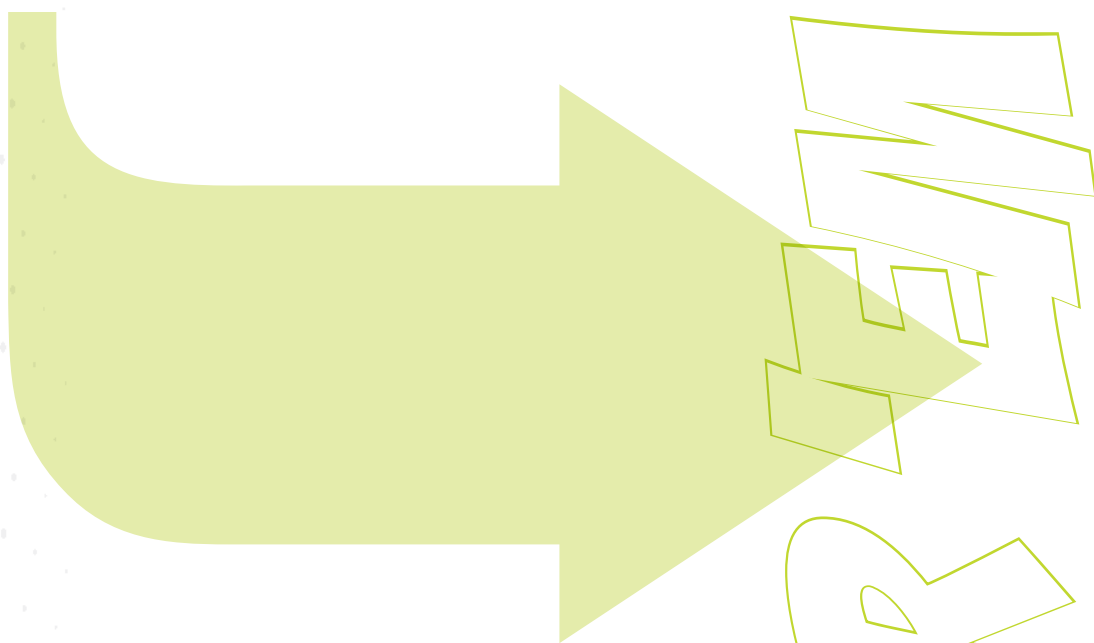
Include any appropriate biographical information including specific expertise about, or relationship to, the issue.

FLASHCARDS: INTRODUCTION

In the flashcards that follow you'll find quick messaging guidance on a range of issues. Tear them out, take them to an interview, or create your own personalized set based on the issues you're talking about. For the rationale behind the guidance included here, take a few moments to read through the first part of this toolkit. For the research behind the guidance, we've posted anything that's publicly available on our website.

These are the first of a series of flashcards that we'll be producing on a range of opportunity issues. They'll all be available for downloading on our website, so check back often.

WWW.OPPORTUNITYAGENDA.ORG



HUMAN RIGHTS

HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE UNITED STATES

CORE MESSAGE: It is better for everyone to live in a society that pays attention to human rights, rather than one that ignores human rights.

- ▶ **Lead with values.** Fairness, dignity, opportunity, and references to America's founding principles. Connect human rights issues to these values, drawing particularly on American experiences and history and our continuing struggle to make our founding ideals a reality.
- ▶ **Start conversations with the goal—upholding human rights—rather than the process.** U.S. audiences have almost no knowledge of treaties and mechanisms and care less about their existence than they do about the conditions these vehicles are meant to address.
- ▶ **Understand concerns around the role of government.** It's important to express government's role in terms of "protecting" instead of "providing" rights and to point out cases in which the government has successfully protected social and economic rights, such as with Social Security and Medicare.



HUMAN RIGHTS

DUE PROCESS

CORE MESSAGE: Due process is a human right central to our Constitution and to the American justice system. American values of justice and fairness stand strong only when we uphold the human right to due process.

- ▶ **Lead with values:** Fairness, equal treatment, America's founding principles. Assert that the United States should **uphold due process in order to stand up for American values.** Focus on the goal of protecting due process over the goal of protecting the rights of specific groups.
- ▶ **Emphasize due process as central to the credibility of our justice system.** Highlight the idea that once we start denying rights for one individual or type of people, it puts all individuals' rights at risk.
- ▶ **Include key information about how the current system denies due process rights.** Audiences are not aware of how our laws violate due process, and some people have a hard time believing that this could be happening.
- ▶ **In addition to being against rights abuses,** talk about the fair processes you are for and that uphold our values.



VALUE

Our nation was founded on the idea that we all have basic rights. American leadership in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a reminder of how central this notion of rights is to our national values.

PROBLEM

But it also reminds us that we have a long way to go to uphold these rights for everyone here. The Universal Declaration talks about health care, housing, freedom from torture, and our right to privacy, among other things. Many of these basic rights are in growing jeopardy, with Wall Street's mismanagement and greed forcing millions out of their homes and with policies that condone torture and invade our privacy.

SOLUTION

Let's return to a nation that strives to respect and protect the rights all humans share, by working together to pass legislation that further protects our life, liberty, and chance at fulfilling the American Dream. In turning the tide, we can return to important documents like the Universal Declaration that remind us of what kind of country we really want to be.

ACTION

Learn about the Universal Declaration at www.un.org/en/documents/udhr and join this year's Human Rights Day activities on December 10.

VALUE

Fair treatment in our justice system is a basic American right. The Constitution is clear that everyone here deserves access to lawyers, a day in court, and fair treatment.

PROBLEM

But our criminal justice system does not treat everyone fairly, including many of the immigrants who encounter it. Even if you've lived here for years, you can be deported if you've been accused of a low-level offense like shoplifting. Our criminal justice system bars many immigrants from access to lawyers, and detains thousands for indefinite amounts of time without hearings. There's no question that we all should be held accountable for our actions, but removal from the country or indefinite detention is a clear example of the punishment simply not fitting the crime.

SOLUTION

We need to re-examine how our justice systems treat everyone here, and align them with the values we hold dear. We need fair systems that ensure we don't punish people without a hearing or access to lawyers. Those rights are central to our values.

ACTION

Join our campaign to restore due process to its rightful place in our justice system.

HUMAN RIGHTS REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

CORE MESSAGE: We all have a basic human right to the information and resources we need to make healthy decisions for ourselves, our families, and our communities about sexuality, reproduction, and gender. Our elected officials have a responsibility to shape policies that remove the barriers that stand in the way.

- ▶ **Lead with values.** Dignity, voice, self-determination, and equality.
- ▶ **Emphasize healthy decisions.** Underscore that we should all be empowered to make decisions about our bodies, health, and sexuality for ourselves, our families, and our communities.
- ▶ **Frame access to services, care, information, and programs as basic human rights.** Supporting families and women means protecting their right to services and information. Protecting these rights means recognizing all families, ensuring freedom from discrimination, and protecting other rights, including housing, education, and health care.



RACIAL JUSTICE RACIAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION

CORE MESSAGE: Equal opportunity is a basic American value and protecting it benefits everyone in our country. Despite the progress we've made as a nation, opportunity is not yet equal across different racial and ethnic groups, with some communities facing steep and unequal obstacles. We all have a stake in removing those barriers to protect our values and move our country forward.

- ▶ **Lead with shared values:** Opportunity, equality, the common good.
- ▶ **Show that it's about *all of us*.** Remind audiences that racial equity is not just about people of color; achieving racial equity upholds our values and benefits our entire society.

Federal regulators allowed predatory subprime lenders to target communities of color, only to see that practice spread across communities, putting our entire economy at risk.

- ▶ **Over-document the barriers to equal opportunity—especially racial bias.** Don't lead with evidence of unequal outcomes alone—which can sometimes reinforce stereotypes and blame. Amply document *how* people of color frequently face stiff and **unequal barriers to opportunity**.



- ▶ **Clearly outline a role for government.** Government paves the way for the promotion and protection of our human rights. Government, comprised of people who represent us, removes barriers such as discrimination and interference, while also investing in the services and information we need to make health decisions.

VALUE

The ability to make healthy decisions, including whether or not to have a child, is a basic human right.

PROBLEM

But the ban on Medicaid funding for abortions creates an often insurmountable barrier for low-income women.

SOLUTION

It's the government's responsibility to remove barriers that stand in the way of each and every one of us to exercise our basic human rights.

ACTION

Call your representative to demand a repeal of the Hyde Amendment.

DON'T begin by discussing the income gap between whites and African Americans; *DO* lead with facts like the 2003 California study that found that employment agencies preferred less qualified white applicants to more qualified African Americans.²

- ▶ **Acknowledge the progress we've made.** This helps to persuade skeptical audiences to lower their defenses and have a reasoned discussion rooted in reality rather than rhetoric.
- ▶ **Present data on racial disparities through a contribution model instead of just a deficit model.** When we present evidence of unequal outcomes, we should make every effort to show how closing those gaps will benefit society as a whole.

The fact that the Latino college graduation rate is 32 percent of the white rate³ also means that closing the ethnic graduation gap would result in over one million more college graduates each year⁴ to help America compete and prosper in a global economy—it's the smart thing to do as well as the right thing to do.

- ▶ **Be thematic instead of episodic.** Select stories that demonstrate institutional or systemic causes over stories that highlight individual action.
- ▶ **Use Opportunity as a bridge, not a bypass.** Opening conversations with the ideal of Opportunity helps to emphasize society's role in affording a fair chance to everyone. But starting conversations there does not mean avoiding discussions of race. We suggest bridging from the value of Opportunity to the roles of racial equity and inclusion in fulfilling that value for all.

2 J. Bussey and J. Trasvina, "Racial Preferences: The Treatment of White and African American Job Applicants by Temporary Employment Agencies in California," Berkeley, Calif.: Discrimination Research Center, December 2003.

3 National Center on Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, 2007 and 2008, Table 9; available at http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_009.asp.

4 This calculation is based on the premise that the Latino population ages 25 to 29 would be graduating college at the 2008 white rate of 37.1 percent, as opposed to the 2008 Latino rate of 12.4 percent.

RACIAL JUSTICE

RACIAL PROFILING

CORE MESSAGE: Racial profiling violates human rights as well as our American values of fairness and justice. It's a flawed policing strategy that hurts communities and, most importantly, threatens our values.

- ▶ **Lead with values:** Equal justice, fair treatment, freedom from discrimination, public safety and accountability.
- ▶ **Define the term** and explain that racial profiling is based on **stereotypes** and not evidence. Explain why racial profiling is not an effective police tool, and counter those who believe racial profiling may be acceptable if it somehow keeps communities safe.
- ▶ **Explain why profiling harms us all**, it threatens our national values of fairness and equal justice, and harms Americans who are wrongly detained, arrested, or injured by law enforcement.
- ▶ Move beyond denouncing racial profiling alone and also **highlight positive solutions** and alternatives that ensure equal justice and protect public safety.



RACIAL JUSTICE

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

CORE MESSAGE: Focus on three main messages.

- Expanding opportunity. *It's in our interest to see that talented students from all backgrounds get a close look and a fair shot at overcoming obstacles to educational opportunity.*
- The benefits of diversity. *Learning with people from different backgrounds and perspectives benefits all students, our workforce, and our country as a whole.*
- Our national interest. *Fostering educational diversity and greater opportunity is critical to our nation's future in a global economy and an increasingly interconnected world.*
- ▶ **Labels matter.** The language of "equal opportunity" is much more effective for us in describing the programs we're defending than terms like "racial preferences" or "quotas." The term "affirmative action" enjoys mixed support.
- ▶ **Tell your story, not theirs.** Proactively tell your own story. "Affirmative action helps to maintain visibly open pathways to opportunity for students from a range of backgrounds. We know it works because of the improved success of all students



- **Offer multiple real-life examples.** The idea of racial profiling is theoretical for some audiences. It's important to provide multiple examples that include "unexpected" people of color—e.g., business people, faith leaders, honor students—who've been wrongly stopped.

VALUE

To work for all of us, our justice system depends on equal treatment and investigations based on evidence, not stereotypes or bias.

PROBLEM

But, too often, police departments use racial profiling, which is singling people out because of their race or accent, instead of based on evidence of wrongdoing. That's against our national values, endangers our young people, and reduces public safety.

SOLUTION

Law enforcement officers need clear rules and proper training to avoid racial profiling and focus on evidence and public safety.

ACTION

Pick up the phone and tell your members of Congress to pass the End Racial Profiling Act and to support proper training and rules for police departments.

who've benefitted from diverse classrooms and campuses." Avoid repeating stereotypes about "unqualified" applicants.

This guidance was prepared in collaboration with the American Values Institute, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

VALUE

Keeping the ladder of opportunity sturdy for everyone in our country is crucial to America's future and to a lasting economic recovery.

PROBLEM

Despite the progress we've made toward equal opportunity for all, far too many Americans are unplugged from decent jobs, fair mortgage lending, or a shot at running a business. For instance, women in our state earn just 77¢ for every dollar that men earn, and women of color earn only 66¢ per dollar. That's bad for our economy, and contrary to our national values.

SOLUTION

Modest programs that promote equal opportunity are one important tool for ensuring that all communities have a chance to achieve economic security and contribute to our state's economy. We must preserve these policies while at the same time pursuing others that advance our shared prosperity, like small business counseling, student aid, and worker training.

ACTION

Host a community meeting or write a letter to the editor supporting strong equal opportunity protections.

RACIAL JUSTICE TALKING ABOUT BLACK MEN AND BOYS

- ▶ **Lead with values.** Expanding Opportunity for All and Community, that we all have a stake in each other's success.
- ▶ **Lift up systemic causes.** Explain the role of systems and structures that are obstacles to opportunity to help people see beyond "personal responsibility" and individual bigotry as the sole causes of inequality.
- ▶ **Highlight clear, concrete solutions** to help overcome "problem fatigue" and build support for change.
- ▶ **Acknowledge the progress that black males have made in American society,** while documenting the persistent challenges that remain. Doing so helps persuadable audiences to "hear" evidence of discrimination and unequal circumstances.
- ▶ **Avoid leading with historical appeals,** which may lose persuadable audiences. Unless you have a receptive audience and enough time for detailed discussion, these arguments are unlikely to persuade in the short-term.
- ▶ **Avoid framing the debate in "us vs. them" terms,** which tends to turn off audiences of all races and ethnicities and increase opposition to reforms. Instead, focus on our shared goals and values and how we all win when opportunity is expanded.



ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AN ECONOMY THAT WORKS FOR ALL

CORE MESSAGE: We need an economy that works for everyone, where the roadmap to opportunity is clear and available to all. The middle class is the engine of our economy and most people's best shot at real opportunity. But it doesn't happen by accident. A strong and growing middle class is the result of decisions we make together to build an economy that is fair and equitable.

- ▶ **Lead with values:** Opportunity and equality, community and the common good, economic security and mobility.
- ▶ **Paint the picture of what a successful economy looks like:** Fair, equitable, a strong and expanding middle class, good jobs, and affordable education.



VALUE

Our future depends on educational opportunity for all children in our community. Access to quality schools with well-trained teachers and adequate resources is crucial to helping kids succeed and contribute fully as adults.

PROBLEM

Unfortunately, our schools are falling short of standard, and African-American boys face particularly high obstacles to educational opportunity. In our school systems today, black boys are disproportionately suspended and expelled, often for minor behavior that in-school approaches could address. Too often, these educational decisions are based on stereotypes and over-reaction instead of best practices and valuing the potential of all children.

SOLUTION

Some school districts are adopting more productive policies that expand the opportunity of all kids to learn. Under a new Arkansas law, for example, the state Department of Education will submit a report each year to the State Board of Education with district-level data on suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to law enforcement, and the Department will provide districts with strategies and resources for implementing positive discipline policies that keep kids in school.

ACTION

Our Parent Teacher Association should push the Board of Education to adopt best practices like those in Arkansas that prioritize education for all children.

- ▶ **Clearly state the economic and political obstacles.** Working and middle-class families struggle while economic inequality grows. Our political system is too influenced by money over people.
- ▶ **Talk about solutions and a positive role for government.** Our economy—and the middle class—don't happen on their own. They are the result of decisions we make together through our government.
- ▶ **Call people to action.** Remind them that we are fighting together for an America that works for all of us. Then point out concrete ways that people can work toward this.

For more information and background on a “Progressive Economic Narrative,” go to: <http://educationfund.usaction.org/pen/the-narrative/>.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY HOME OPPORTUNITY

CORE MESSAGE: A decent home for our families and ourselves is central to the American promise of opportunity, a source of security and pride. The chance to own a home we can afford, under fair terms, is a fundamental part of the American Dream. Rebuilding that dream is in our national interest and crucial to our economic recovery.

USE AN OVERARCHING CORE NARRATIVE to tell the story of “home opportunity” in different ways. The narrative has five basic elements:

- ▶ **Values.** Opportunity, economic security, the common good.
- ▶ **The real causes.** Emphasize that the prime causes of the foreclosure crisis were abuses by lenders and Wall Street and inadequate rules and enforcement.
- ▶ **Shared harms.** This fallout is undermining the economic security of families and the stability of communities and is deepening inequality throughout our country. That hurts all of us.



IMMIGRATION IMMIGRATION POLICY REFORM

CORE MESSAGE: We need a commonsense approach to immigration policy, one that upholds our values and moves us forward together. We need a reasonable immigration process that gives new Americans a roadmap to citizenship so that they can fully contribute to and participate.

FOCUS ON THREE CORE THEMES:

- ▶ **Upholding our values.** Our national values: fairness and opportunity for all, equal treatment, freedom from discrimination, American due process, and basic rights/human rights. Our shared personal values: family, economic security, opportunity, and work ethic.
- ▶ **A commonsense approach.** Emphasize a positive vision for the country and a way to get there. Our flawed immigration policies are the problem, and we, as a democracy, have the power and responsibility to change them to make sure they are reasonable and fair.
- ▶ **Moving forward together.** Discredit “us vs. them” distinctions. Highlight our cultural, economic, and historical connections to each other. Because we’re all connected, those contributions are important to everyone and bad policies hurt us all.



- ▶ **Solutions and American ingenuity.** Emphasize practical solutions that will build a more fair and prosperous economy. Fair rules and enforcement are crucial, along with investment in recovering communities.
- ▶ **Action.** Issue a specific action to your audiences.

VALUE

Access to an affordable home under fair terms is central to the American promise of opportunity, and to our nation's economic security.

PROBLEM

But misconduct by the lending industry and inadequate rules and enforcement helped to wreck our economy and deny that promise to millions of Americans.

SOLUTION

Fortunately, solutions exist that can prevent further foreclosures and restore the American Dream. They include steps like mandatory mediation, reducing loan principal to fair market rates, and ensuring that reforms of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac keep homeownership available to working Americans.

ACTION

The Administration and Congress should work together to implement these solutions today.

VALUE

America is a nation of values, founded on an idea—that all men and women are created equal. So how we treat new immigrants reflects our commitment to the values that define us as Americans.

PROBLEM

But everyone agrees that the current patchwork of policies and programs is mismanaged and broken, and it breaks up families. That's not what this country stands for.

SOLUTION

America deserves a commonsense immigration process, one that includes a roadmap for New Americans who aspire to be citizens.

ACTION

We live in a democracy where we have the power and responsibility to change flawed policies. Your member of Congress needs to hear your voice: Reform our immigration policies now.

IMMIGRATION ANTI-IMMIGRANT POLICIES

CORE MESSAGE: These laws are impractical, violate our values, and divide our communities. We need approaches that embrace fairness, equal treatment, and due process.

- ▶ **Use three core themes:** commonsense approach, values, moving forward together.
 - Messages about upholding our nation’s values can underscore the importance of fairness, justice, and equality, while talking about standing up for the kind of country we want to be.
 - A commonsense approach can point out the impracticality of anti-immigrant bills: they make law enforcement’s jobs more difficult, and they’re not the right approach.
 - Moving us forward together is a reminder to tell audiences why these bills are bad for everyone and divide communities.
- ▶ **Include positive solutions.** This is an opportunity to talk about what does work, not just attack a policy that doesn’t. Recent research shows that a conversation without our own positive solutions can quickly turn to support for harsh enforcement measures. The implication that we are against enforcing existing laws without offering new ones can drive away potential supporters.



IMMIGRATION IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

CORE MESSAGE: Americans value diversity, inclusion, and opportunity for all. We understand that the energy, ideas, culture, and spirit of new Americans is part of what makes us who we are—and who we will become. We need to ensure that newcomers have what they need to participate, contribute, and succeed.

- ▶ **Use three core themes:** commonsense, values and moving forward together.
- ▶ **Lead with values.** Opportunity, equality, inclusion, diversity. Connect immigrants to the values you highlight. Emphasize the values that immigrant Americans and other residents share—family, work, community. Assert that values make someone an American, not where they come from or what they look like.
- ▶ **Avoid “us” and “them” distinctions.** When talking about immigrants, try to talk about all aspects of who they are beyond simply immigrant designation: workers, business owners, mothers, neighbors.



VALUE

It's our legislators' job to guide our state toward prosperity and opportunity.

PROBLEM

Instead, they passed this new anti-immigrant law, which is impractical, violates our values, and divides our communities.

SOLUTION

Instead of feeding anti-immigrant sentiments, we need a commonsense approach that embraces fairness, equal treatment, and due process.

ACTION

Our immigration laws are badly broken, but disregarding our values is not the answer to fixing them. We need to call on Congress to reform our federal immigration policies while we focus on fixing our state's real problems.

- **Use “integration” with care.** When communicating to general audiences, it's better to resist the temptation to use shorthand and to explain instead the programs and principles the term stands for in full.

VALUE

This country is known around the world as a land of opportunity, and immigrant communities contribute much to that reputation and to our success.

PROBLEM

However, we often leave these communities high and dry when we consider the policies and services our communities need.

SOLUTION

It's important to remember that two-way street when it comes to investing in our communities. We're all better off when new immigrants are set up to succeed and when they can attend English classes, get small business loans, and start on the road to citizenship. All of this adds up to a reinvigorated economy with confident, educated consumers, contributing diverse viewpoints and cultures to the our unique region.

ACTION

Support immigrant-friendly policies in your community.

A POSITIVE ROLE FOR GOVERNMENT

CORE MESSAGE: Investing in opportunity—such as expanding skill-building job training, investing in education, and rebuilding our crumbling infrastructure—is a unique role that only our government can play.

Adapted from “Building Support for Government” by Public Works: The Demos Center for the Public Sector.

- ▶ **Focus on mission and purpose.** To overcome Americans’ lack of understanding of the unique mission of government, talk about government’s embodiment of shared values that we all hold dear.
- ▶ **Highlight the roles of government that the public can acknowledge and value,** including planning for a prosperous and healthy future for all, stewardship of our resources, and the building and preservation of community.
- ▶ **Reinforce the notion of interdependence and shared fate.** Promote civic thinking, advance notions of mutual responsibility, and discuss why government is necessary to the functioning of society and a tool for achieving a better quality of life for all.



BUILD YOUR OWN MESSAGE:

VALUE AT STAKE

Why should your audience care?

PROBLEM

Document and describe.

SOLUTION

Avoid compassion fatigue.

ACTION

What can your audience concretely do?

- ▶ **Emphasize its mission as distinct from, but not at odds with, business.** Illustrate how we all benefit when business and government work together. But underscore that it's government's unique role to protect and preserve our common good and public interest.

TALK ABOUT SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES. People forget the extent and diversity of government's day-to-day work. Bring into focus its actual activities.

- ▶ **Describe government as the “public structures”** that are the foundation of our society and fundamental to our prosperity, stability, opportunity, and a strong middle class.
- ▶ **Define government using terms that reflect democratic ideals:** responsible manager, watchdog, long-term planner, the people's voice, etc.

ENCOURAGE CIVIC THINKING. Combat the pitfalls of consumerist expectations.

- ▶ **Reinforce notions of interdependence.** Talk about how our shared quality of life and prosperity depend on how we work together and support each other.
- ▶ **Use “ownership language.”** Refer to government using collective pronouns that emphasize collective ownership and responsibility of “our” government.
- ▶ **Avoid portraying government as a laundry list** of services that individuals “buy” with tax dollars. Focus on shared community benefits from public services, systems, and structures we build and maintain.

For full reports of the research that informed these tips, please go to <http://www.publicworks.org/>.

MESSAGING NOTES

FLASHCARD

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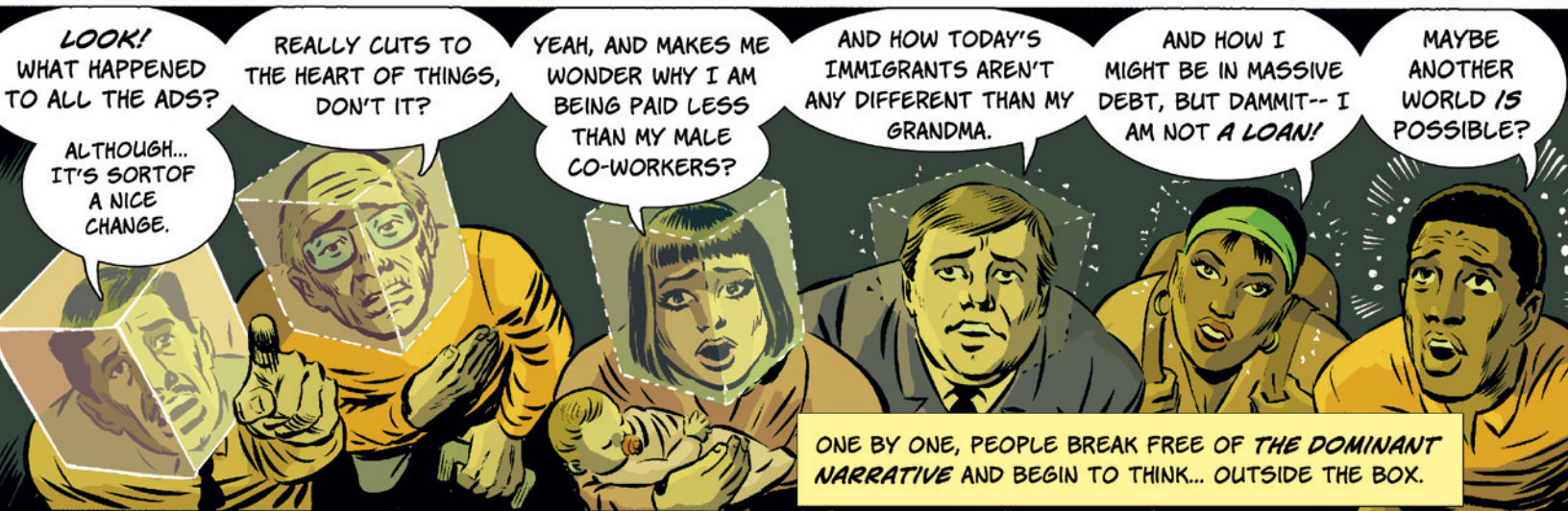
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The Opportunity Agenda

*Building the National Will
to Expand Opportunity in America*



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