Solutions Matter

A brief guide to grounding your communications with concrete programs, examples, and policies

West End Home
FOUNDATION

Aging service providers, advocates and funders—all of us—believe deeply in our important work serving older adults. Building public support for this work is not always easy, and more broadly held ageist stereotypes can sometimes stand in our way.

The **National Center to Reframe Aging** and its research partner, the Frameworks Institute, continue to develop practical insights and tools for communicating more effectively about older adults. This includes tested insights about the values, metaphors, and language that resonate with people "beyond the choir," that is, people who do not work every day with older adults or in the aging field.

As described more fully in the Frameworks Institute's **Gaining Momentum** toolkit and in "*Getting Better about Older*," West End Home Foundation's guide to communicating more powerfully about aging services, strong messages have three parts:

1 A value like justice or innovation that we can all understand

2 An explanation of the problem, how it works, and who is responsible

3 A compelling, relevant solution to the problem

Here, we focus on this third, and sometimes overlooked, part of a good message. Solutions matter because without a clear sense of how to confront the problem described, our readers or audience may be intrigued, inspired, or even outraged, but that emotional response will remain unfulfilled. And instead of feeling motivated to action, we are left feeling that this is yet another issue we can't do anything about. Some have called this crisis fatigue. A gnawing sense of fatalism about older people can set in. More simply put, a good story, like a good message, needs a good ending.

Five C's *Checklist for Strong Solutions*

The **Frameworks Institute has developed a list of the five things** that make a solution persuasive:

CONCRETE

Abstractions and general ideas are less helpful than clear, well-described programs or policies. What exactly will you do to address this problem? Who is involved? How many people will you help? How will you implement the solution?

COLLECTIVE

The solution should show how it benefits a group of people and how it operates in the context of other services in the community as a whole. This suggests that it is a problem that the whole community should address and not the sole responsibility of an individual or family to solve themselves. And further, it is a solution that the community should support.

CAUSAL

How does the program or policy work? Don't leave it up to the imagination. Make the connections for your audience. How exactly does the solution address the problem and lead to better outcomes?

CONCEIVABLE

It is one thing to set out an ambitious vision, but if you don't demonstrate a clear path to achieving that vision or that program/policy, then you won't be taken seriously. Any solution, therefore, should seem feasible and connected to what your audience can influence or at least support.

CREDIBLE

A solution is always more powerful when it is delivered by a person or organization who does not have a direct financial or political stake in the result. Can your solution be carried by a neutral, third party and lend credibility to your cause? Are there testimonials from disinterested parties that can lend their authority to your solution?

Examples of Effective Solutions

The best solutions are connected to the larger message that you are constructing. They should follow directly or logically from the value you suggest and the explanation of the problem. In fact, if you have a strong solution in mind, it is important to ensure that your argument leads naturally to that solution. Too often, we start by talking about a huge problem, quoting national statistics, and then our solution is more modest or local. Better to go back and frame the solution using a value and problem that are directly tied to what you are trying to achieve.

For a community or senior center

The new XYZ Intergenerational Center, located on near the downtown transportation hub, will enable older people to participate in programs and receive the services they need, and at the same time house a child care center that will engage older people as volunteer staff to enrich the child care provided.

For a new workplace policy to protect against age discrimination

The Better Older Workers bill will build on existing federal anti-discrimination statutes by making it easier for older people in Tennessee to report illegal corporate behavior to an independent ombudsman and encourage employers to create workplaces that enable all of us to contribute, regardless of our age.

For a transportation program

The new XYZ Ride Share program fills important gaps in the county transportation system, where regularly scheduled busses and disability vans do not currently reach. Building on a large group of volunteer drivers and an online system that can identify all ride options, the Ride Share program will provide point-to-point transportation to medical and other services, needed by homebound older adults.

For more information

Contact Dianne Oliver at the West End Home Foundation (Dianne.oliver@westendhomefoundation.org) about additional ways you can learn about reframing your communications.

Or check out these helpful web sites:

- *The National Center to Reframe Aging (from The Gerontological Society of America)*
- *Changing the Narrative (from the NextFifty Initiative and the Rose Community Foundation)*
- *Gaining Momentum: A Frameworks Communications Toolkit (From the Frameworks Institute)*

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