

Narrative Change

June 26, 2024



Access notes

1 Captions

Access by clicking the caption button at the bottom of the toolbar in your Google Meet window.

2 Recording

This session will be recorded.

3 Access to slides?

Yes.

4 Pacing

Stop me if I'm speaking too fast or if there's anything that I can do to make the experience more accessible.

Agenda

Part 1: General Narrative Change

1. Writing for power
2. Asset framing
3. Words to replace and embrace
4. Engaging online

Part 2: Narrative Change for *Johnson v. Grants Pass*

5. Narrative change and *Johnson v. Grants Pass*
6. Key findings
7. Top tested messages
8. Audiences
9. More words to replace and embrace!

Writing for Power

Short and concise

- Lead with the information you want people to walk away with.
- Brevity and simple language is key
- Get straight to the point
- Clearly state the main idea or call to action up front
- Don't bury the lede

Example

The complex and multifaceted nature of the ongoing homelessness crisis demands that we employ a comprehensive and holistic approach that requires collaboration and coordination between various stakeholders, including government agencies, non-profit organizations and community members.



We all have a role to play in solving homelessness.

Don't repeat opposition messaging

- Instead,
 - Share stories that build a narrative of belong
 - Point out the systems that force people in homelessness

Example

Many people assume that drug addiction and mental health issues are the root causes of homelessness, but in many cases these are actually the result of homelessness. Skyrocketing rents, lack of available units and low-paying jobs are the primary drivers of homelessness.



Everybody wants a safe place to call home. But skyrocketing rents, lack of available units and low-paying jobs are forcing some of our neighbors into homelessness.

Asset Framing

**Service-
resistant**

**Refused
shelter**

**Hard to
serve**

**Homeless
youth**

“

**“You can’t lift people up by putting
them down.”**

— Trabian Shorters

”

Asset framing

We typically hear or read sentences like:

“The man refused to go to the shelter because of its rules.”

Asset framing would shift it to this:

“The man was **devoted to his dog, and wouldn't abandon her** even though it meant they had to stay on the streets because the shelter doesn't accept pets.”

Words to Replace and Embrace

Example



Creating programs that
make housing affordable.



**Ensuring everyone can
afford a place to live.**

Example



We need to END
homelessness.



We need to SOLVE
homelessness.

Example



Everyone, no exceptions.



**No matter what we look like
or where we come from;
whether we are white, Black,
Native Peoples or newcomer,
Latine or Asian.**

Example



Low income families.



Hard-working families.

Engaging online

Engage online

...but don't feed the trolls.

- What is a “troll”?
 - Someone who intentionally provokes or offends others in digital spaces, often through inflammatory or hateful posts, thriving on attention and validation.
 - While some engage in malicious activities, others do it for playful amusement.
 - But not every angry comment online is trolling.
 - Some people may have valid concerns or complaints, but express them in an angry, aggressive or critical tone.
 - They may be misinformed, but sincerely believe what they are posting.

When to respond

- The user seems sincerely interested in having a productive dialogue
- There is some truth or legitimacy in their statement
- They are spreading misinformation

How to respond

Reminder: No matter what you say and how you say it, you're unlikely to change their view – but others in your audience will see your response. You are not here to win a debate, but to offer an alternative, to insert your values.

- Remain calm and don't let emotions drive your response
- Limit responses to one comment/statement (not a conversation)
- Be respectful and communicate with poise and clarity, express empathy
- Share your values (our communities are safer, cleaner and better for everyone when everyone has a home)
- Use humor when appropriate, but not to tear the commenter down
- Provide facts/resources
- Invite them to be part of the solution
- Consider posting a separate statement, video or image to address the issue rather than responding directly to posts or comments
- Consider adjusting your settings to not allow replies
- When appropriate, steer further conversation to a private platform

Example

Negative Commenter

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Our Reply

Nobody wants to be homeless. For people battling addiction (often caused by the stress of being homeless), having a home is the first step to get their lives back on track, especially when coupled with the support or treatment they need. You can't get healthy without a place to live.

Example

Negative Commenter

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Our Reply

Thank you for your comment and for your concern about our neighbors. **We agree that this situation isn't working** for anyone. The good news is that **there are solutions.** Housing + supportive services, zoning reforms, converting buildings to increase available housing, and more. Homelessness is awful but we can ensure everyone has a home and the support they need to keep it. **Here are some resources and ways you can help.**

Narrative Change and *Johnson v. Grants*

Pass

Background.

The Housing Narrative Lab, in partnership with the National Homelessness Law Center, conducted national public opinion narrative research to understand what the public thinks about efforts to arrest, fine and ticket people who experience unsheltered homelessness, and identify messaging that builds support for effective, compassionate solutions.

THE GOAL OF THIS PROJECT IS TO:

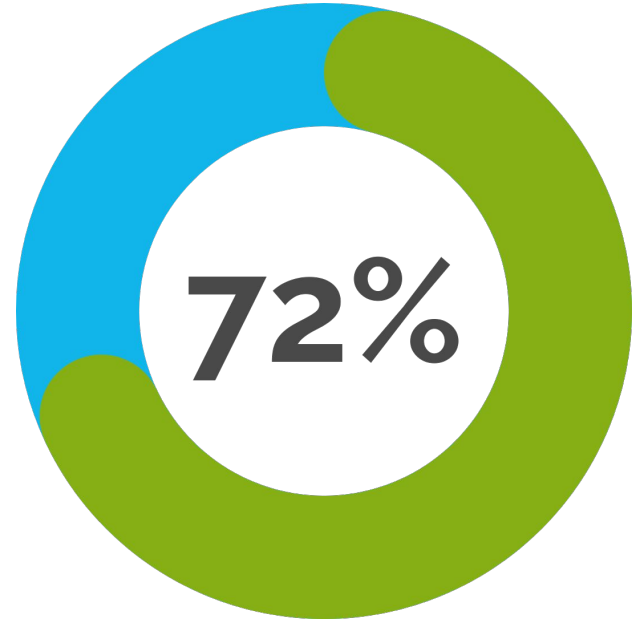
1. Create momentum for the housing justice movement and expand support for housing and supportive services as the solution to homelessness.
2. Encourage officials, the public and other stakeholders to reject ticketing, fining and arresting people experiencing homelessness.

Key Findings

Finding #1

A significant majority — 72% of people — reject plans to jail, ticket or fine people for sleeping outside if there's no shelter available.

Three out of five respondents say rent or housing being too expensive for people to afford is a major factor that contributes to people sleeping or living outside.



Finding #2

It's important to name the housing and support services you are advocating for. People responded more positively to messaging that includes a specific call to action and solutions.

People recognize homelessness is a big problem, but need to be convinced that housing and compassionate solutions are effective.

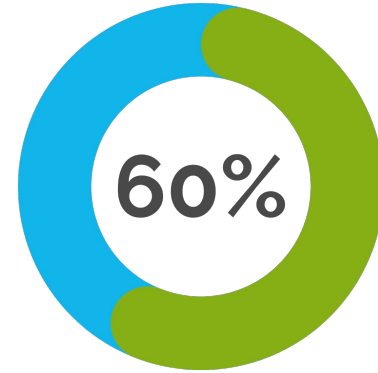
Finding #3

The majority of survey respondents have personal experience with unstable housing (two-thirds) or homelessness (almost 3 in 5) so messages should emphasize the connection between widespread housing instability and homelessness.

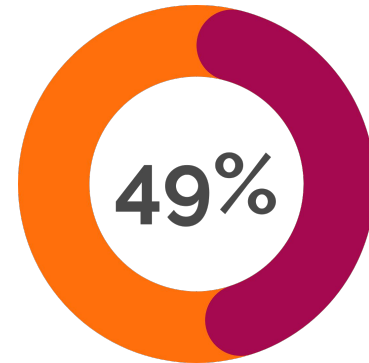


Finding #4

Three out of five people (60%) believe homelessness is caused by economic factors, such as high rents, lack of affordable housing, or jobs that don't pay enough.



Three years ago when the Housing Narrative Lab conducted national research, less than half (49%) of respondents believed that economic factors caused homelessness.



The Big Shared Narrative

Everyone needs a safe place to sleep. But homelessness is increasing as too many of us struggle to afford a quality, stable place to live. Public officials should focus on real solutions – access to housing that people can afford and the support services they need to be healthy and stable.

Top tested messages

Understanding our audience

- **Base:** This group agrees with all aspects of our messaging and will share our narratives. This is the group we want to excite and encourage to bring others in and take action.
- **Persuadables:** The “movable middle.” They can hold two opposing ideas at the same time (i.e. Housing is a human right AND homelessness is caused by bad choices). We want to move them to our side., through targeted-values based messaging.

We All Need a Safe Place to Sleep

“No matter our race, gender, or income **we all want to get and keep a roof over our heads.**”

But homelessness is increasing across the country as more households struggle to make ends meet.

Rent is too expensive, wages are too low, and we have seen decades of failed housing policies.

We should focus on solutions like building more housing options for all income levels, not trying to arrest our way out of homelessness.

Arresting or punishing people experiencing homelessness makes things worse.

The real solution is providing access to housing they can afford and the support services they need to become stable.

Handcuffs do not get anyone closer to housing.”

Personal Story

“Homelessness was not part of my plan, but after I lost my job, I was evicted and forced to live on the streets.

This was stressful and taught me that homelessness can happen to anyone.

Thankfully, I wasn't fined or thrown in jail for trying to survive and sleep in the public park.

Instead, thanks to resources in my community, I received the help I needed to secure stable housing and a permanent job.

The housing programs and support services made available to me helped me get back on my feet.”

Shifting Resources

“Homelessness can happen to anyone.

Today, more than 600,000 people experience homelessness, including 250,000 who sleep outside with no access to shelter.

Studies show unhoused people have lower life expectancies and are four times more likely to have attempted suicide. Increased housing costs, not enough housing options, mental health crises and financial insecurity all contribute to increased rates of homelessness.

There are proven ways to help and provide people with lifelines – shifting resources to programs that keep housing affordable, ensuring people have access to support services and funding shelters and transitional housing options.”

Top tested messages

Messages that worked tended to:

Start with shared values like strength, inclusivity and housing as a basic need

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Messages that fell short tended to:

Name problems that seem disconnected from homelessness to many listeners, such as medical debt.

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Messages that fell short tended to:

Name vague solutions such as “create more housing” or “changing local building codes.”

Top tested messages

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Name the problem of homelessness and **link it to economic factors** such as wages not keeping up with rising rents.

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Name the problem of homelessness and **link it to economic factors** such as wages not keeping up with rising rents.

Messages that fell short tended to:

Talk about “handcuffs” or “punishment” or “crime,” which activates well-established narratives in the U.S. that there must be a “good” reason for people to be in handcuffs or be punished.

Top tested messages

Messages that worked tended to:

Include clear and tangible solutions to ensure everyone has a safe place to live, and **name how ticketing and fining people will only make the problem worse.**

Focus on **solutions that non-experts can easily understand** like “build housing that is affordable to people of all income levels.

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Messages that fell short tended to:

Focus on drug use and mental illness as the primary causes for homelessness, advocate for homelessness solutions in the name of protecting property values or highlight violence and crime.

Audiences

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1 Insiders

Community leaders, young college-educated people in progressive pockets, organizers, advocates, service providers and people who work in the housing sector

- Believe housing is a human right
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2 Like-minded base

People who agree with all or most aspects of your messaging and solutions

- Under 45, women, lean left, Black, Latino, or have personal connection to housing instability
- Group we want to mobilize
- Responds to messaging rooted in values of justice and human rights.
- Emphasize the structural causes & specific solutions

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3 Persuadable

“Movable middle”

- Can hold two opposing ideas at the same time.
- Use targeted, values-based messaging
- Responds to messages that connect the economy and homelessness
- Name the source of problems and available solutions
- Proactively communicate with this audience

Audiences

4 Rural and suburban

- More likely to believe a person's homelessness is the result of bad personal choices, substance use or lack of family ties
- Use storytelling that dispels these stereotypes
- Use consistent, shared-values messaging

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- Connect racial inequity and homelessness
- Make strong calls to action

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6 Younger adults

Under 45

- Likely to have a personal connection to housing instability and homelessness
- Emphasize how housing insecurity and homelessness affect most of us
- Provide a clear CTA

Words to replace and embrace

Audiences

Replace

Criminalizing

Audiences

Replace

Criminalizing

Embrace

Arresting or ticketing
people;

Punishing people;

Levy thousands of dollars
on people;

Audiences

Replace

Criminalizing

Embrace

Arresting or ticketing
people;

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on people;

Why

People have visceral
understanding that arrests
and tickets have serious
consequences.

Criminalizing is more vague
and theoretical with a third of
people confused or unsure of
what it means.

Audiences

Replace

...does more harm

Audiences

Replace

...does more harm

Embrace

...makes things worse

Audiences

Replace

...does more harm

Embrace

...makes things worse

Why

“makes the cycle of harmlessness worse” or “makes things worse” tests better than “does more harm.”

Audiences

Replace

In my neighborhood...

Audiences

Replace

In my neighborhood...

Embrace

In my community...

Audiences

Replace

In my neighborhood...

Embrace

In my community...

Why

Because of economic and racial segregation, people are more likely to see the need for solutions in their community than in their specific neighborhood.

Audiences

Replace

Affordable housing

Audiences

Replace

Affordable housing

Embrace

Housing that is
affordable for all
income levels

Audiences

Replace

Affordable housing

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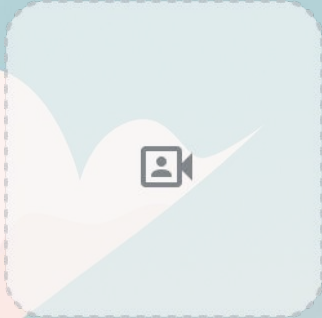
Why

Avoids negative stereotypes people have about affordable housing and uses language that explicitly connects housing to economic factors.

Resources

Resources

- Housing Narrative Lab [Abbreviated Field Guide for Narrative Change](#)
- Housing Narrative Lab and Lake Research [Findings from a 2-Day QualBoard & National Dial Survey](#)
- Housing Narrative Lab [Movement Message Guide](#)
- Housing Narrative Lab [Movement Message Guide Executive Summary](#)
- Housing Narrative Lab [Research Deep Dive Webinar May 2024](#)
- NHLC [Research Highlights](#)



Thank You