



# a toolkit

*making* COMMUNICATIONS *connections*

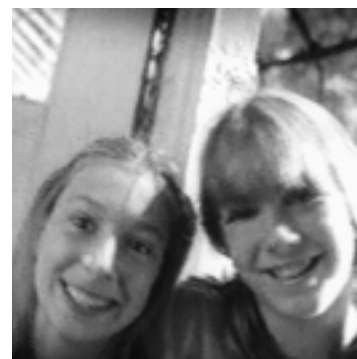
FOR THE  
ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION'S  
*MAKING CONNECTIONS* SITES

using this  
toolkit

The “Making Communications Connections” Toolkit, written by the FrameWorks Institute, is a companion document to its narrated CD-ROM presentation developed and produced for the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s *Making Connections* sites. This toolkit is designed to provide you with the tools necessary to consider those communications campaigns that might prove effective for raising the issues you care about in your community. It is meant to be used as a complement to media workshops and materials provided by UCLA’s Center for Communications and Community, a FrameWorks partner.

The tools provided here are based on research conducted by the FrameWorks Institute for the Annie E. Casey Foundation. This research included the development of an assessment protocol for evaluating communications campaigns, and an in-depth review of more than 50 campaigns from across geographic and issue areas by a panel of experts. To all this work, the FrameWorks Institute brings its unique perspective on framing public issues through innovative methods derived from the cognitive sciences and values-based communications.

We hope you will use this toolkit, in combination with the CD-ROM, to more effectively use communications in advancing the issues of your community. Please let us know your feedback by contacting us at [info@frameworksinstitute.org](mailto:info@frameworksinstitute.org). You may also want to visit our website [www.frameworksinstitute.org](http://www.frameworksinstitute.org) for more information about effective campaigning for social issues.



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#### THE TOOLKIT INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING:

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- “Getting Started,” an overview of the contents of the CD-ROM and technical tips in playing the presentation on your computer;
  - A review of the strategic components that comprise effective communications campaigns;
  - A description of the elements of the frame and their importance in communications campaigns;
  - A media diary, for documenting communications campaigns in your community;
  - A checklist that you can use to evaluate campaigns; and
  - An addendum to the CD-ROM that describes how to create a budget for developing your own communications campaign.
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# getting

## THE "MAKING COMMUNICATIONS CONNECTIONS" CD-ROM

The "Making Communications Connections" CD-ROM is a fully narrated presentation developed and produced by the FrameWorks Institute for the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Making Connections* sites. The CD-ROM presentation covers the following information about communications campaigns:

- An introduction to communications campaigns
- Strategic components of communications campaigns
- Three perspectives on campaigns:
  - Commercial Advertising
  - Journalism
  - Political Consulting

- Three case studies:
  - Stereotyping and Tolerance
  - Keeping Kids in School
  - Community Supports
- How to assess communications campaigns
- Conclusion

To watch the CD-ROM presentation, just insert the CD into the CD-ROM drive of your computer and it will begin playing automatically. However, in this age of technology, it's important to keep some technical tips close at hand.



# started

## MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Windows:  
400MHz Pentium MMX  
processor  
8X or better CD-ROM drive  
64MB of RAM  
800x600 monitor with  
16-bit color  
QuickTime 4.0 or later  
Windows 98

If you use Windows and the program does not start automatically, double click on the My Computer icon on your desktop and double click on the drive that you use for CDs (with many computers, it's your D drive). Then right click the MakingConnections CD icon and select the Explore option. Once there, you will see a Start icon, which you must double click to start or restart the presentation. If you are instructed to install QuickTime, click on the folder named QuickTime

CDInstaller. Inside that folder is the icon named QuickTimeInstaller, which must be double clicked to install QuickTime. Once QuickTime is installed, restart the presentation by double clicking on the Start icon.

Macintosh:  
G3 processor  
4X or better CD-ROM drive  
64MB of RAM  
800x600 monitor with  
16-bit color  
QuickTime 4.0 or later  
System 8.0 or better

If you use a Mac and the program does not start automatically, double click the MakingConnections CD icon on your desktop. Once there, you will see a Start icon, which you must double click to start or restart the presentation.

## MORE CD-ROM TECHNICAL TIPS

1. You can start and stop the presentation at any time by clicking your mouse on the "pause" button at the bottom of the screen. You can also use the arrow keys to view a previous slide or to advance the presentation.
2. When the arrow on the bottom of the screen is flashing, it means that the presentation is in "pause" mode to allow the viewer to take notes. When you are ready to begin the presentation again, just click your mouse on the arrow.
3. On the bottom of the screen, there is a button entitled "menu." By clicking on "menu," you will be taken to the table of contents for the presentation. From the menu, you can choose to jump to a different section, resume the presentation where you left off, or exit the presentation.

Choosing to participate in a communications campaign, or developing one of your own, can be an effective way to get your message to a key audience or to build a broader constituency for community change. But not all communications campaigns work equally well for social issues. There are many campaigns that sell products, elect politicians, brand companies, and raise money for causes. These kinds of campaigns offer us some important tools, but require careful evaluation and adaptation by those who are promoting policies and programs, not products or politicians. So how should community advocates think about effective campaigns for issues that affect our families, our schools, our neighborhoods, and our community institutions? And how do you determine whether a particular campaign is a good campaign for advancing your issue and your perspective on that issue?

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One of the most important things to consider is how to match your campaign goals with the techniques you use to deliver your messages. This section of the toolkit helps you do just that by articulating the strategic components that comprise good communications campaigns.

# strategic components

## STRATEGIC PLANNING

Before embarking on a communications campaign—whether you intend to create it yourself or to borrow an existing campaign—it is important to “do your homework” and articulate a clear plan for your campaign. What is it you want to accomplish? And how can communications

help you get there? Based upon our experiences, a good communications campaign plan would include:

- A clear definition of the problem;
- Well-articulated solutions;
- Designation of specific audiences who can help solve the problem;

- A practical call to action;
- An overall plan for the campaign;
- Well-defined tactics;
- A thoughtful execution of the plan; and
- An evaluation of the campaign’s impact.

## MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT

With a clear strategic plan in place, the next step in the process is to develop the content of your message and connect the message with your goals and objectives. Sometimes, advocates get ahead of themselves and develop the message first, before they’ve articulated a clear plan. This often results

in goals, messages, and outcomes that are mismatched. In order to determine whether the content of your message fits with your plan, you should be able to answer “yes” to all of the following questions:

- Do you understand what your target audience already thinks about the issue?

- Is the message you’ve chosen likely to get people to rethink the issue, to solve the problem?
- Does the message set up policy solutions to the problem?
- Is it clear what you want people to do, how they can do it, and what will be the result of their doing it?

FRAMING THE MESSAGE

This component in a communications campaign is about making sure you are really communicating the message you've chosen by carefully choosing the various elements that go into framing your campaign. In the section of this toolkit entitled, "Thinking Strategically About Framing: Elements of the Frame and Their Applications to Communications Campaigns," we have provided greater detail about each element of the frame, explaining how you can effectively use that element to frame your campaign message. We think you will find it useful to look through that section carefully as you consider how to frame the message of your campaign.

The elements of the frame are:

- Context
- Numbers
- Messengers
- Visuals and Symbols
- Models and Metaphors
- Tone

An effective campaign should think through each of these elements and the implications of each of the following campaign choices:

- Who are the knowledgeable and trustworthy messengers you want to deliver your message?
- What visuals or symbols help to reinforce the frame or message we've chosen?
- Are familiar values being communicated in addition to information?
- Does the campaign help us understand issues we don't know by relating them to things we do know, through familiar stories and metaphors?
- Is our message clear in suggesting who made the problem and who should fix it?

SIGNING ON OR CREATING CAMPAIGNS

Let's say you find a campaign that works for your issues—but it's not playing in your community, it's only in the adjacent state. You can:

- Contact the sponsors and ask them what plans they have for expanding the campaign to your community.
- Suggest a meeting to discuss their progress with the campaign and future plans, and to acquaint them with your work.
- Ask if they are looking for local groups to help lobby local media to run the campaign.
- Ask if they would be interested in a formal arrangement with your group, allowing your group's name to appear on print and TV ads.
- Suggest a way you could help in getting public-service spots aired in your community by contacting local stations that know your group.

Let's say you find a campaign that is pretty good, but could be a lot better. You'd like to think about adapting it for your community. You could:

- Contact the sponsors and ask them whether there is room for new creative elements in their campaign, and if they might be willing to work with your community to develop these.

- Examine the sponsorship of the campaign: Is it an Ad Council campaign? If so, you may be able to work with the nonprofit sponsor and the Ad Council to create a specially adapted campaign for your community. Is it a station or network promotion? If so, you may be able to contact your local affiliate and ask them to bring that campaign to your community. Is it a commercially sponsored campaign? If it is, and you have that industry in your community, you may be able to convince the sponsor to widen the distribution to include your community.

- Think about what you want to add to, or change about, the campaign. It's always easier to use the overall message, and then create more specific products that "tailor" the message to your issue or audience. However,

if the campaign is multi-year, you may be able to ask to brainstorm the next round of creative concepts, and to get the creators to see your perspective on the issue. So find out the schedule or "roll out" of the campaign.

Let's say you see a great campaign that is operating in your community, but you're not a part of it. You could:

- Contact the sponsors and ask them for a meeting.
- Study the current placement and reach of the campaign — are there ways your organization could extend this campaign through your connections with local shops and citizens' groups, or with stations serving your community?
- Suggest a partnership that would allow you to appear on some of the advertising in exchange for placing it more broadly.
- Ask to be included in the planning committee when the campaign goes into its next phase.

Let's say you don't like any of the campaigns you see, but it gives you some good ideas about the kinds of campaigns you'd like to see in your community. You could:

- Contact a local station or paper that is active in your community. Be attentive to what outlets reach which populations and how this relates to your overall strategy—you want to make sure you reach the people you need to mobilize for change, as well as those directly affected by an issue. Ask for a meeting with the person charged with community relations. Bring representatives from several community groups to that meeting to demonstrate your broader community reach. Share with the station your understanding of the issue, and how you might partner in creating better community understanding of it and the public will to address it. If you've seen a campaign you like on another issue, bring materials that convey your vision. If you have ideas for commercial partners, say so.

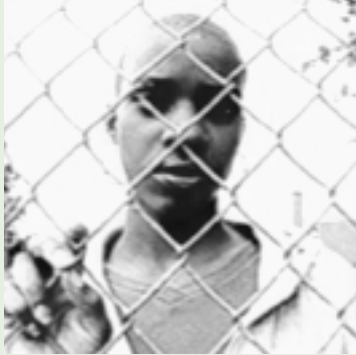
Be aware that, for public-service campaigns, stations provide deep discounts to advertisers, so you may be able to create a winning combination of your community group, a local advertiser that wants to be associated with your issue, and the station.

- If you have a good idea and think it might appeal to a local business that already buys advertising (car dealership, restaurant or grocery chain, real estate company, etc.), go directly to the public relations department or head of that company. Ask them if they might be willing to partner with you on some public service advertising in support of a good community cause. If they already have an advertising agency, you may be able to get them to create advertising for you pro bono and to piggyback your public-service ads when they buy time for their product (getting free space for your ads). You may be

able to get them to run a brief message or logo for your group, or to create and run a topical or seasonal message (back to school, Martin Luther King Day, children's health) for your group as part of their advertising.

While there are many opportunities for creating campaigns, remember the lessons learned from our "Making Communications Connections" CD-ROM: make sure you participate in developing the message, have a say in reviewing and approving the creative concepts, and have a strategy for capitalizing on the product. Bad communications won't help your cause, and even the best communications, without a broader strategy, won't realize your goals. So remember the five lessons we shared in the "Making Communications Connections" CD-ROM, and use these to help you think strategically about the message you are sending:

1. Don't reinforce negative stereotypes.
2. Change perception by aligning with the values you want to convey, not by directly reinforcing the negative perceptions you are trying to change.
3. Don't assume that statistics alone are enough to persuade. If you don't believe the message, others won't either.
4. Use research to inform a solutions message, but trust your instincts when using statistics in the message. If you don't believe the message, others won't either.
5. Connect people to communities. In telling stories, don't isolate individuals from the policies and programs that support them.



## THINKING STRATEGICALLY ABOUT FRAMING

*Elements of the Frame and Their Applications to Communications Campaigns*

# framing

In this section of the toolkit, the elements of the frame are reviewed to provide you with a more in-depth understanding of the various elements that you can use to develop the messages of your campaign. An effective campaign should think through the implications of each of these elements, and make choices about them to support the campaign goals. For each element, we will highlight what research suggests about the element, as well as some tips for using this element of the frame in your campaign.

# context

Context is one of the most difficult elements of the frame to describe, and one of the most important to get right in a communications campaign. In FrameWorks' trainings, we explain context by first showing the group a picture of cows chewing grass in a field. We explain that some cows are getting sick, and we ask the group to speculate about the cause. Invariably, people work within the frame that has been given to them; they ask if the farmer gave the cows bad feed, or if the farmer is experienced, or if the cows have wandered into an adjacent field, or if the cows caught a disease from other cows. We then add in a backdrop that shows an urban landscape with smoke stacks belching fumes just over the cows' heads, and we ask the group again: Why do you think the cows are getting sick? This time, of course, they are able to broaden the scope of their speculation to include environmental causes, and to ask

about the relationship of the cows to their air, water, and soil. This exercise brings home the importance of getting context into the initial definition of the problem.

Context is not merely details about individuals, but details about trends. And to identify trends requires systems-level thinking. Applied to communications campaigns, this means that you must be strategic in identifying the problem you want to communicate as one that involves the entire community. The way you identify the problem makes all the difference in how people are able to view your solutions. When people understand issues as individual problems, they may feel critical or compassionate, but they won't see policies and programs as the solutions. For example, the dominant frame for children's issues is a needy child and a parent, and this two-person frame sets up the idea that the parent, and the

parent alone, is responsible for the child's needs. However, if you provide context and broaden the frame to include other parents, the community, business leaders, the mayor, etc., you define the problem as public in nature and expand the possibilities for meeting children's needs.

To go back to the FrameWorks training example, systems-level thinking forces us not to view the cows within the narrow frame of the field and the farmer. It gives us more options in defining the problem and in creating appropriate solutions. Without systems thinking, we are forced into narrow solutions: "fix the parents in order to fix the kids."

Context is one of the missing ingredients that distinguishes episodic from thematic reporting—important distinctions for community advocates to understand. Stanford University political psychologist Shanto

Iyengar explains that “the essential difference between episodic and thematic framing is that episodic framing depicts concrete events that illustrate issues, while thematic framing presents collective or general evidence.” Episodic reporting is heavily reliant on case studies, human interest or event-oriented reporting, and depicts public issues as the plight of an individual homeless person, an airline bombing, etc. By contrast, thematic coverage places the individual incident within long-term or national trends;

it explores causes and effects; and it explains, rather than dramatizes. Context defines an issue as “public” in nature, and therefore appropriately solved in the realm of policy.

HOW TO GET CONTEXT INTO COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGNS:

- Link current data and messages to long-term trends.
- Interpret the data: tell the public what is at stake and what it means to neglect this problem.

- Define the problem so that community influences and opportunities are apparent.

- Focus on how well the community/state is doing in addressing this problem, not how well individual parents are doing.

- Assign responsibility.

- Present a solution.

- Connect the episodes of your community’s issues to root causes, conditions, and trends.

## What research suggests about this element of the frame:

- Context establishes the cause of the problem and who is responsible for solving it.
- Context can further systems thinking and minimizes the reduction of social problems to individual solutions.
- Context must be built into the frame with the introduction of the problem.

# numbers

An important finding from the cognitive sciences is the ability of the frame to overpower the numbers that follow. In other words, “if the facts don’t fit the frame, it’s the facts that are rejected, not the frame.” Confronted with facts that one might presume should have caused a group of people to reconsider a particular position, these people opted instead to hold to their position and to ignore the conflicting data.

As many have come to realize, both numbers and narratives evoke frames. The trick is how to combine them so that they work together to evoke a frame of collective responsibility and public policy. In communications campaigns, this is especially critical, since you are trying to communicate complex information in a compelling yet concise manner. Here are some simple suggestions for integrating narrative and numbers into your communications campaigns:

*First, never provide numbers without telling what they mean.* While experts concerned with objectivity may feel it is important to “put the numbers out there and let the facts fall where they may,” they are setting the stage for public misunderstanding, public boredom, or public manipulation by those who do not hold back from interpretation.

WEAK EXAMPLE:

In Vermont, 200,000 children have dental carries. More than half the population of children in the state have not seen a dentist in the last three years. This is a severe problem.

BETTER EXAMPLE:

New technology and treatments, programs, and policies make it possible for us to protect our children from most tooth decay and oral disease:

- Fluoridation of the water supply reduces caries by 26 percent in adolescents.

- Children with dental sealants and visits have only one fourth as much tooth decay as those without.
- Children and adults with dental insurance are much more likely to have timely visits to a dentist.

*Second, keep the numbers to narrative ratio low.* Too many statistics confuse the listener. Embed the statistics in a tight story that tells what is happening, how big a problem this is, and what can and should be done about it.

WEAK EXAMPLE:

“Over the past 25 years, the proportion of children in poor countries immunized against six dreaded diseases has increased from 5 to 75 percent.” What’s wrong? Too many numbers, too little interpretation. Let’s reframe it.

BETTER EXAMPLE:

“The success of childhood immunization in poor countries is a testament to what



we can accomplish if we work together for a common good. For every child fully immunized against childhood diseases a quarter century ago, there are now 15.”

*Third, try to provide the interpretation first, then the data.* That way, your numbers connect to an idea. By raising the broader principle first, you allow people to hear your numbers as evidence, not as raw data. In the following examples, the idea is prevention, and the numbers that follow make the point that this is affordable and doable.

EXAMPLE:

“Education is poverty prevention for women. Each extra

year of a girl’s education brings an increase in family income, a reduction in the fertility rate, and a decrease in infant, child, and maternal mortality. Each extra year yields this important progress.”

ANOTHER EXAMPLE:

“If we know how to fix a problem that children suffer from, we should do it. A mosquito net that costs about \$4 can save the lives of millions of children worldwide. Yet that \$4 is out of reach for most of those who need it. To most of us, it’s a hamburger; for half the world’s population, it’s two full days’ wages.”

It is imperative that those who seek to engage and educate the public find ways to help people imagine the reality the numbers represent, so that they can appropriately assess what’s at stake. The Advocacy Institute and Berkeley Media Studies Group have pioneered an approach to communicating statistics that they call “social math.” By this, they mean “making large numbers comprehensible and compelling by placing them in a social context that provides meaning.”

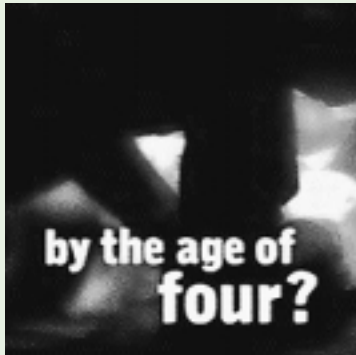
Here’s a good social math example for driving home the power of solutions in addressing the community problem

of global warming: “Setting higher government standards for fuel efficiency could be met through better transmissions and engines, more aerodynamic designs, and stronger yet lighter material for chassis and bodies. These changes can cost effectively increase the average mpg of today’s automotive fleet from 24 to 40 mpg by 2012 without compromising safety. This would be the equivalent of taking 48 million cars off the road.”

HOW TO USE NUMBERS AS  
ADVOCACY TOOLS IN  
COMMUNICATIONS  
CAMPAIGNS:

- Use numbers sparingly. When you use dramatic numbers, you may have the inadvertent effect of making the problem seem too big, too scary, or too far away.
  - Provide the meaning first, then the numbers. Use social math to reinforce that meaning.
- Use numbers strategically: not to establish the size of the problem, but to convey the cost of ignoring it.
  - Use numbers strategically to convey that the problem is man-made.
  - Use numbers to demonstrate that we know how to solve this problem.





## What research suggests about this element of the frame:

- Once a frame is established, it will trump numbers.
- Most people cannot judge the size or meaning of numbers; they need cues.
- Numbers alone often fail to create pictures in our heads.

# messengers

Choice of messenger is one of the most important tactical choices to be made before taking an issue public. Messengers are the people who become the physical symbol of the issue—they sign op/eds, appear at news conferences and before civic groups, speak on TV and radio talk shows, and testify at hearings. They answer the question, “Who says this is a problem I should pay attention to?” Messages can be reinforced or undermined by their attachment to a spokesperson. Skill is required in matching the message to the messenger, and in anticipating the impact of particular messengers on public thinking.

The problem inherent in the choice of messenger is that, without a careful appraisal of the match of messenger and message, you are likely to reinforce one of these negative roles for the public, inadvertently allowing the public or critics to dismiss their testimony.

Recent research sheds new light on how people choose whom to believe. Two criteria are critical to the public’s assessment of a messenger’s credibility: knowledge and trustworthiness. The importance of a speaker’s knowledge explains why pediatricians, school nurses, teachers, and coaches are credible messengers on children’s issues—they have regular contact with children and are trained to evaluate them.

Trustworthiness, however, presents more of a challenge. Trustworthiness can be determined by assessing the speaker’s character. But, in the absence of such personal information, listeners often evaluate trustworthiness based on whether the speaker has “put their money where their mouth is” through an action or whether the speaker would have anything to gain by lying. They are looking for sincerity, but also for vested interest. Hence the concept of “unlikely allies”: a police

officer is a more persuasive spokesperson for the importance of early childhood education because s/he has no apparent reason to lie on this issue.

And, contrary to popular wisdom, “you do not necessarily learn more from people who are like you, nor do you learn more from people you like. This is why most people turn to financial advisers, instead of their mothers, when dealing with mutual funds, and back to Mom when seeking advice about childrearing.”

There are sensitive challenges to identifying and using effective messengers to increase public understanding of, and support for, community issues. In this regard, it is important to separate perception from reality. Sometimes the logical spokesperson on an issue is not believable for some reason. For example, social workers are often not perceived as credible in talking about preventing violence by

investing in kids. Why? Because prevention and treatment are their life's work, social workers are not seen as objective on this issue. Also, because social workers begin with prevention as an answer, they don't arrive there after looking at the evidence. Furthermore, they are not objective spokespeople because prevention is an old answer and the level of recent violence seems to call for new answers; if this worked in the past, why are we now seeing the Columbines and the

Paducahs? And finally, social workers convey treatment and the premise of social responsibility for others, not mutual responsibility, which is what Americans are looking for. The messenger undermines the message.

#### HOW TO USE MESSENGERS EFFECTIVELY IN COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGNS:

- Use messengers that reinforce the systemic connection and underscore the severity of the problem.

- Use business leaders and government officials to establish the public interest.
- Use messengers that can attest to the reality, severity, and consequences of your campaign's issue in a domain well understood by the public.
- Use unlikely allies.
- Use advocates carefully, understanding the public's assumption that they are already vested in the issue.

## What research suggests about this element of the frame:

- The choice of messengers is as important as the message itself.
- The message is reinforced or undermined by the choice of messenger.
- Knowledge and trustworthiness are critical to public acceptance, not likability or familiarity.
- Some messengers are not credible on certain issues because we assume they are biased toward a perspective.
- Unlikely allies can prompt public reconsideration of an issue or recommendation.
- Some messengers convey specific frames.

# visuals

We have been concentrating on words and how they trigger models and frames. But don't underestimate the power of visuals in your communications campaign. After all, it has been said that "a picture is worth a thousand words." Pictures trigger the same mental models and frames as words do. It is important to be aware of this, so that the frames introduced by the pictures do not work against the frames introduced by the words. Advocates often say that they cannot control the pictures at news conferences, but to some extent you can—in the way you stage the news conference and in what you suggest to the media as the visuals to accompany your story. Furthermore, there are many vehicles you can use in your communications campaigns—such as advertising, brochures, fact sheets, action alerts, reports, and so on—in which you can control all the visual elements, and therefore the messages they send.

What, then, are the factors to consider when planning a visual, whether it is a film clip, photograph, illustration, or graphic (including maps and charts)? First, it's important to anticipate the visuals or symbols that will be applied to your issue if you do nothing to control them. More than likely, these will be generic images and will trigger frames that are traditionally associated with that issue. For homelessness, as an example, it's a good bet that the visuals will be a single homeless person and will emphasize individual responsibility. FrameWorks' research strongly suggests that this type of visual trigger undermines the public's willingness to engage with the issue.

Second, recognize that choosing the "right" visual is only the first step. Even image placement can reinforce or undermine your message. Location, size, and color can also affect the impact of your visuals. Images seem more

important when they are centered, in the foreground, brightly colored, sharply defined, or overlapped with other elements. Human figures, cultural symbols, or icons also signify importance. Consider the layout of your document as a whole.

## HOW TO USE VISUALS EFFECTIVELY IN COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGNS:

- Avoid traditional images that have dominated the news on your issue.
- Avoid close-up shots of individuals or of only a child and their parents.
- Suggest the public nature of the problem with pictures of public, health, and community settings.
- Use sequence and placement of photos to demonstrate cause and effect—trends instead of isolated events.

# What research suggests about this element of the frame:

- Pictures trigger the same models and frames that words do.
- Pictures can undermine a carefully constructed verbal frame.
- Pictures are visual shorthands.
- Close-up shots emphasize the personal and conceal environmental and systems-level influences.
- The narrower the frame, the less opportunity for systems-level thinking.



# simplifying models

Because every word that we speak and every image that we produce are linked in different ways to many frames and models (it is words and images that in fact trigger the models), language and imagery will always manipulate. That is unavoidable. By bringing a level of analysis to these metaphors and models, however, community advocates will be less likely to be caught using language and imagery that in fact work *against* the policies or positions we are advocating.

Often, when advocates take on an issue that is well established in the public discourse, they find they must evaluate and address the metaphors and models most closely associated with that issue and

their unintended consequences. For example, George Lakoff and Joseph Grady have demonstrated that, when adults think of children as “precious objects,” child care is often conceptualized as a container, which provides protection for the child. This, then, takes on a number of pernicious “entailments” or consequences that come bundled with the metaphor and infect our reasoning:



## CHILD CARE AS A CONTAINER FRAME

Child care center	→	Container
Children	→	Packages
Leaving children at center	→	Putting objects in a container
Caring for children	→	Handling objects
Child care workers	→	Package handlers

# What research suggests about metaphors and models:

- Complete ways of thinking, which include patterns of reasoning.
- Allow us to make extensive inferences beyond the words actually used.
- Highly quotable for news media.
- Effective alternatives to other storytelling devices.

All of this reasoning is hidden from both the reasoner and the observer. Yet it is precisely this hidden process that yields an overt opinion that there is no problem with paying child care workers low wages. Once the mental mapping has taken place, the reasoner is able to quickly sort through any new information and to come up with a “logical” assessment. Moreover, while people might well support higher wages for package handlers or child care workers, if given time to think about the consequences, we have landed here in the prototypical frame—the generic model that does not allow for more thoughtful reasoning.

ENTAILMENTS OF THE  
CHILD CARE CENTER AS  
A CONTAINER FRAME

If child care is package  
handling:

- Is it a highly skilled job?
- Do you need to hire highly skilled workers?
- Does it pay well?
- Does it need to pay well?
- Does the environment at the facility matter?
- Do the relationships between handlers affect the package?

Hence, the difficulty of getting “quality” into the public debate over day care, as it is currently conceptualized. The power of the metaphor is that it effectively shuts some considerations out of the frame, and highlights others—safety, for example, is foregrounded in this metaphorical reasoning.

# tone

FrameWorks' research on various issues has been consistent in showing that when the discourse about social problems becomes too extreme, too dire, or too partisan, large segments of the public are likely to tune out and dismiss the message, and few new converts are likely to be made. When any issue is described as an "epidemic" or in the context of a series of negative predictions (the sky is falling), it shuts down thinking. In some cases, people prioritize other community issues instead of the one you are promoting. In some cases, they ask who is responsible and conclude that this is a problem of individual laziness or neglectful parenting. In some cases, they ask who is behind these "inflated" statistics and conclude that it must be liberals, advocates, or some other vested interest—and then their assessment relates to identity politics: liberals are in favor, but

others suspicious. Even potential supporters, however, can be turned off by overtly melodramatic discussions and made skeptical by dire warnings.

When people are presented with a communications campaign that is reasonable in its discussion of the problem, its causes, and the potential solutions, they are more likely to listen and to absorb new information. Their "Decent Person" instincts kick in and they begin thinking about how to solve the problem rather than how to identify the hidden agendas of the messengers. Strongly worded or overtly partisan rhetoric may energize the core child advocate base and get the attention of policymakers, but it is often ineffective as a tool for moving most Americans toward solutions-based thinking.

## GUIDELINES FOR USING TONE EFFECTIVELY IN COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGNS:

- Avoid doomsday scenarios. If your discussion refers to truly dramatic impacts, discuss them in terms of facts and particulars, rather than sensational generalizations.
- Use language and analogies that bring the problem down to Earth; appeal to the average American's sense of responsibility by bringing the problem down to human scale.
- Avoid explicitly partisan critiques in situations where you are trying to appeal to a broad group of potential supporters.
- Preserve advocates and experts as spokespeople for factual messages. They can express concern, but lose effectiveness when they are seen as point people for special interest groups.



## What research suggests about this element of the frame:

- People toggle between a “rhetorical mode” and a “reasonable mode” of thought and discourse on social problems.
- Rhetorical mode polarizes people, turning many off, and is characteristic of much political and media discourse.
- Reasonable mode, which reflects more typical individual thinking, makes people more open to scientific findings and practical problem-solving.
- Extreme statements and partisan attacks turn many potential supporters off and do little overall to increase support for solutions on the issue.
- Advocates lose credibility when they talk in doomsday terms.
- The label “advocate” itself is somewhat polarizing, since it sometimes suggests dogmatism and a one-issue identity.

# communications campaigns in my community

FOR THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION'S *MAKING CONNECTIONS* SITES

26 In your efforts to communicate the issues of your *Making Connections* community, it may be useful to keep a media diary of the existing communications campaigns in your area. By sharing the task of gathering information about all public sources of information about health, education, and other “public service” topics, you will be better able to assess which campaigns make sense for your issue and your community’s goals. You can do the equivalent of a “community sweep” by asking several people to divide up the work, noticing and documenting the campaigns current in your community. Even if you don’t like anything you see, or don’t want to sign on to any existing campaigns, you’ll also be able to assess what messages the public is getting about your issues! This is helpful as you address citizens’ groups, funders, and the news media. Knowing what’s out there is a part of doing your homework on public perceptions of your issues.

Through this diary, you can track the signs, billboards, flyers, TV and radio messages, newspapers, etc., that you might encounter day-to-day for a particular campaign. Then, you can use the assessment checklist in your toolkit to determine whether any existing campaigns meet your needs. For more information about how to assess campaigns, watch the FrameWorks Institute’s CD-ROM for *Making Connections*.

Attached is a form that you can copy and use for each campaign you observe. You can devote two hours of television time to observation, or a one-hour commute on the bus, or a week of drive-time radio or visual observation during your commute along your city’s freeways.

# diary



Here are some more specific examples of where you might encounter this sort of information:

- Billboards by the road
- Bus and transit stations
- TV, radio, newspapers
- Flyers in local stores, businesses, libraries, YMCA, etc.
- Signs posted on doors, billboards, windows, kiosks, etc.

Here are some more specific examples of topics that might be mentioned in public-service communications campaigns:

- Drug abuse
- Pregnancy
- Domestic violence/child abuse
- Littering
- Preventing fires
- Drunk driving
- Health/mental health information
- Job safety

# media diary

## making connections

Your *Making Connections* site might work on other issues, not included in this list. So you might want to make a master list of all the issues/topics on which you work, and then use that list to keep your diary of campaigns. Here is an EXAMPLE of how you might fill out the media diary.

Location of *Making Connections* site: Seattle, Washington

Name and e-mail of person completing this diary form:  
Jennifer Smith, jsmith@aol.com

Type of Campaign:

TV

Station name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date(s) observed: \_\_\_\_\_

RADIO

Station name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date(s) observed: \_\_\_\_\_

NEWSPAPER

Name of paper: \_\_\_\_\_

Date(s) observed: \_\_\_\_\_

MAGAZINE

Name of magazine: \_\_\_\_\_

Date(s) observed: \_\_\_\_\_

BILLBOARD

Location of billboard: \_\_\_\_\_

Date(s) observed: \_\_\_\_\_

POSTER/STOREFRONT

Location of poster: \_\_\_\_\_

Date(s) observed: \_\_\_\_\_

BUS, SUBWAY, OR OTHER TRANSIT

Type of transit and location: Bus stop

Date(s) observed: August 16, 2001

INTERNET

Website name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date(s) observed: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes on Campaign:

Campaign slogan: For kids who are sick, there's nothing like the power of a wish. If you know a child with a life-threatening illness, please call us.

Memorable phrases or text from advertisement: When he dreamed of playing in the majors, you didn't just give him seats behind homeplate.

Organization sponsoring campaign: Make-A-Wish Foundation

Campaign phone: 1-800-722-WISH

Campaign website: www.makeawish.org

Other information that would help us to identify the campaign and/or the sponsor:

It had a picture of child with a baseball cap on.

Notes from observer: I think this would make a good campaign for our community, since we have decided to focus on child health. Since it's running already, maybe we could contact the sponsor and ask them to put our group's name as a local contact. Or maybe we could call attention to it with an op/ed that makes the link to our specific issues (CHIP, Medicaid, and immunization). Worth a discussion at our next meeting.



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