

**Public Works**  
Building Public Will for the Common Good

**Making the Case for Public Solutions to Food Insecurity in California**  
Sacramento, CA - May 5, 2015

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**Public Works is dedicated to building public will for the common good.**

*We equip community leaders, advocates and public servants with the skills and knowledge they need to be articulate and vigorous supporters of the role of government in a functioning society.*

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## Today's Session



- Understanding Public Attitudes
- Tools for a Improving Public Understanding and Building Support



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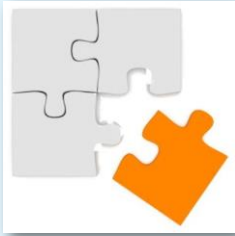
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## The Story We Tell . . .

Turn to the person next to you and describe:

- . . . the way you would describe food assistance programs to someone who asks you what you do . . .
- . . . your "pitch" to an elected official or staffer about the program, what it does and why they should support improvements or expansions . . .

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Frames are mental structures that help people understand the world, based on particular cues from outside themselves that activate assumptions and values they hold within themselves.

- Berkeley Media Studies Group

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## Framing

*"Framing research examines how thinking, communication, and culture interact, and understanding those interactions can help advocates determine how to communicate more effectively."* - Larry Wallack

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## Framing is Always Happening

If we do not pay attention to how we frame our issues people will default to the "pictures in their heads."




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**Sam is a Snake**

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- Would you lend money to Sam?
- Would you let him housesit?
- Would you like him to date your friend?
- Would you trust him to keep a secret?

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## Development, Not IQ

Early experiences affect the architecture of the maturing brain and establish either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for all of the development and behavior that follows.

When a young child experiences excessive stress, chemicals are released in the brain that damage its developing architecture. These stress chemicals make it harder for brain cells to grow and connect to each other.



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What are our dominant stories about hunger, poverty, and public programs?




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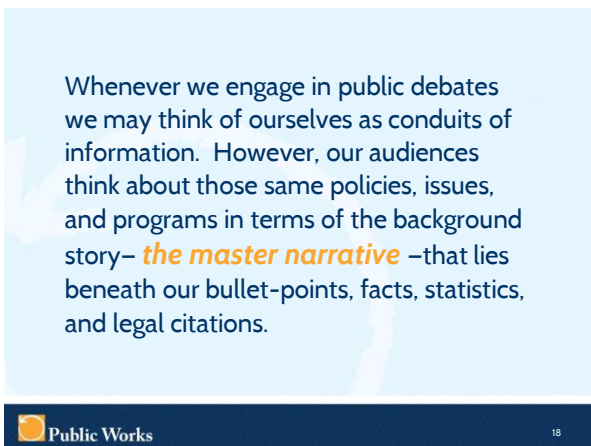
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Whenever we engage in public debates we may think of ourselves as conduits of information. However, our audiences think about those same policies, issues, and programs in terms of the background story– *the master narrative* –that lies beneath our bullet-points, facts, statistics, and legal citations.




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When we try to talk about anti-poverty programs . . .

**WORK HARDER!**  
MILLIONS ON WELFARE  
DEPEND ON YOU!

. . . we run up against powerful cultural narratives about poverty and “poor people” and government as the “enabler.”

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## What Shapes Economic Outcomes?

Policy? Programs?  
What?



Hard Work?  
Absolutely!




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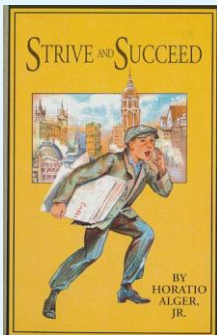
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## Narratives We're up Against



Poverty and hunger are...

- the result of poor choices or bad morals
- not as bad as they used to be or as elsewhere
- a temporary state because of America's economic mobility
- Intractable; and solutions will be expensive and will cause dependence

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## Some Public Beliefs Work for Us . . .

- Hard work should be valued and rewarded
- Working people are struggling
- The country needs to act to impact the economy
- People are judging the economy based on their perceptions of *how they and people like them are doing*.
- We can all work together to find solutions

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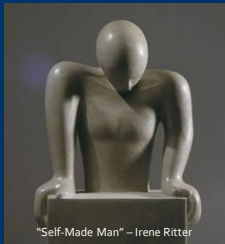
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### Self-Made Man



"Self-Made Man" – Irene Ritter

Independence

### Benevolent Community



Interdependence

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### Individual Problem



Individual Solutions

### Collective Problem



Collective Solutions

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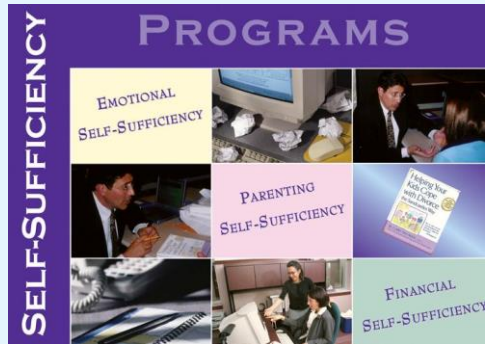
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## Which narrative are we reinforcing?




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*instilling hope* *creating opportunity* *generating prosperity*

**Burst for Prosperity**

About Us Strategic Initiatives Research Public Policy Press Room

**Reducing Poverty, Building Prosperity**

Burst for Prosperity seeks to reduce poverty in Washington State by researching and testing innovative models informed by the community that transform systems to help people achieve financial independence. The goal is for individuals affected by poverty in Washington State to become self-sufficient and financially independent members of the community.

Burst is an initiative of  
**CHILDREN'S HOME SOCIETY**  
of Washington

**Refugees find a new chance through farming**

The Refugee Farming Project has helped a group of Burundian refugees find hope through their stewardship of a hidden piece of land amid the industrial warehouses in the Kent Valley. Community leader Serges Hakizimana reflects on their experience.

[More about this story](#)

[Read about the Economic Independence Initiative](#)

Erica Shultz / The Seattle Times

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Burst for Prosperity seeks to **build thriving, resilient communities** in Washington State. **We believe communities rise and fall as one.** When we allow one part of the community to weaken, it weighs us all down. We strive to strengthen and transform communities by **putting in place strong public systems** (like subsidized child care and job training and education) **that help all families attain the stability and security that come with good jobs.**

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*Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.*

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## Today's Session



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## The "Don'ts"

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# Don't Otherize




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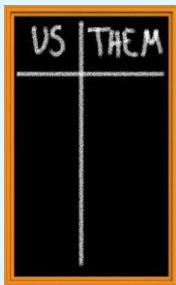
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## Are we talking about “Us” or “Them”?



- vulnerable children
- at risk-youth
- poor neighborhoods
- disadvantaged populations
- “the poor” as categorically distinct from “working class” or “middle class”

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## Are we telling a story of “others?”

There are an estimated 46 million Americans receiving food stamps.....Few issues elicit such emotional reactions from people. Some believe **many of the people receiving these benefits really shouldn't be** .....Others sympathize **with people who suddenly have their livelihoods yanked out from under them** ....Then **there are the moochers** ...people who will simply do as little as they absolutely have to in order to get by..... Such indignation is natural — and justified. But it's important to realize we can't always tell the moochers from those who legitimately need help.

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The central challenge for modern, diversifying societies is to create a new, broader sense of “we.”

- Robert Putnam

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Be  
Careful  
of Crisis  
Stories




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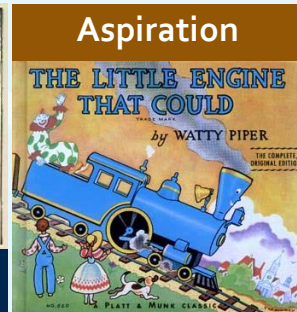
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Chicken Little

Desperation



Aspiration

THE LITTLE ENGINE THAT COULD

by WATTY PIPER

THE COMPLETE ORIGINAL EDITION

ILLUSTRATED BY PATTY & MARK CLARK

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Families without housing face a staggering number of obstacles. Children can suffer from poor academic performance, have higher rates of asthma, ear infections, stomach problems, and speech problems, and are at higher risk of mental and physical trauma. Parents struggling with housing security find it difficult to get and keep a job, pursue educational goals, and provide adequate care and attention to their families. By creating opportunities for families to build economic and housing security, **families can build better lives and our communities will be stronger.**

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We know that **communities are stronger and healthier** when families who are struggling get the help they need to find and stay in safe, affordable housing. As a result, families improve their children's education, find stable employment, and have a deeper sense of belonging in their neighborhood. It is for this reason that the public sector should work with nonprofit organizations and private funders to give every family the opportunity to have a safe and stable home.

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## Do not cue up stereotypes in an effort to refute them . . . .

**6 SNAP (FOOD STAMP) MYTHS**

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (or SNAP, the new name for food stamps), is one of the best lines of defense against hunger in the United States. The federal food program helps working families, seniors and many others in need put food on the table. But stereotypes about SNAP and who uses it persist.

**Let's set the record straight:**

**Myth #1: People who get SNAP don't work.**

**FACT:** The overwhelming majority of SNAP recipients who are able to do so, according to the [Center for Budget and Policy Priorities](#), "many SNAP households with at least one working adult, one disabled adult, more than half with children receiving SNAP, and more than 40 percent work in the year prior to or the year after receiving SNAP. The rates are even higher for families with children—more than 60 percent work while receiving SNAP, and about 60 percent work in the year or subsequent year."

**What's more, many SNAP participants aren't physically able to work. About 20 percent of SNAP participants are elderly or have a disability, according to the USDA.**

**Myth #2: SNAP is a handout for beggars.**

**FACT:** Every \$1 in SNAP benefits generates \$1.75 in economic activity, according to [Food for Economic Self-Sufficiency](#). SNAP not only helps low-income people buy groceries, it keeps up cash for other expenses, such as medical care, utilities, home repairs and education. That benefits local businesses and their employees, which boosts the economy as a whole.

**Myth #3: SNAP is rife with fraud and abuse.**

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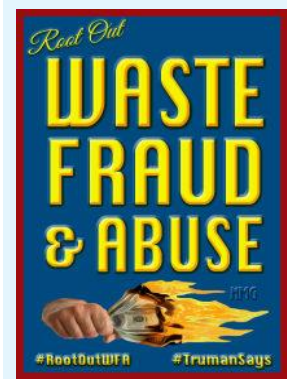
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- A dominant and difficult trap
- Important to be *for* program integrity
- But pivot quickly, back to the larger issues at stake
- Use key facts that help

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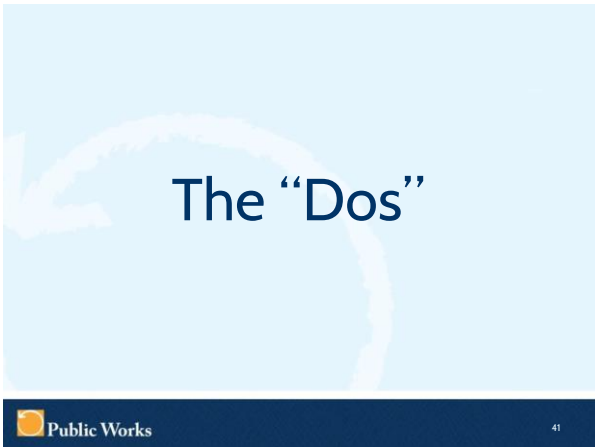
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**What Can be Done**

**Why it Matters**

**What's Wrong**

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**What is at Stake  
(Rolling to Solution)**

We're failing our children by letting them experience homelessness. We all want kids to succeed in school and life – for their future and ours. To succeed, they need a place to call home.

-Alison McIntosh  
Oregon Housing Alliance

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**Speaking to Values Directs Thinking**

- We reason first from deeply held values.
- Values help answer: "Why does this matter to me/us?"
- We need to start with Values, not with the policy and program details.

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## Speak to Values First

“The health of the whole community is **protected** when we ensure that our children are immunized. One of the ways we do this is through **our public health agencies** that provide free and low cost **immunizations for all children**. We need extended clinic hours to keep up with growing demands.”

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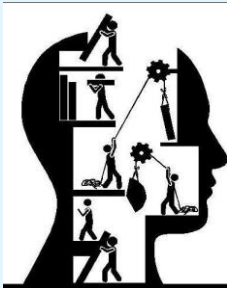
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## Levels of Thinking



- Level One – *Big ideas:* **protection**, **justice**, **family well-being**, **equality**, **opportunity**, **prosperity**
- Level Two – *Issues:* **housing**, **environment**, **children's issues**, **workforce development**
- Level Three – *Policies:* **pay equity**, **bycatch**, **SCHIP**, **presumptive eligibility**, **EITC**

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# Using Values

What are the overarching values that underpin your work?

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## Portrait



## Landscape

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## Different Stories > Different Solutions

### Portraits

- Individuals
- Events
- Private
- Better information
- *Fix the person*

### Landscapes

- Issues
- Trends
- Public
- Better Policies
- *Fix the Condition*

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Analysis of news reports suggest that when poverty is framed as a societal problem, society is deemed responsible. Alternatively, when news presentations illustrate poverty with a specific example of a poor person, responsibility is assigned to the individual.

(Iyengar, 1990).

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## Is paid sick leave about....

....a sick child who stays home alone?



.....the school nurse who explains how community health is affected?




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## Ripple Effects




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## Explaining Ripple Effects

The president's stimulus plan . . . . .boosted monthly food-stamp allocations. Starting in April, a family of four on food stamps received an average of \$80 extra.

*Money from the program . . . percolates quickly through the economy. . . . .for every \$5 of food-stamp spending, there is \$9.20 of total economic activity, as grocers and farmers pay their employees and suppliers, who in turn shop and pay their bills. . . . .the food-stamp boost is almost immediate, with 80% of the benefits being redeemed within two weeks of receipt and 97% within a month, the USDA says.*

- The Wall Street Journal – July 7, 2009

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## The Don'ts

- Don't otherize
- Don't tell crisis stories
- Don't cue up stereotypes to refute them (e.g. waste, fraud, abuse)

## The Do's

- Focus on Solutions
- Lead with Values
- Tell Landscape Stories
- Explain Ripple Effects

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## Frame Deconstruction Exercise

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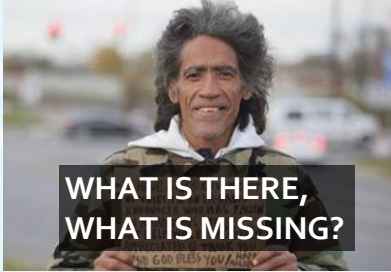
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## Assessing Frames



[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cl\\_fmXQCTw&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cl_fmXQCTw&feature=related)

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“... A talent for speaking differently, rather than for arguing well, is the chief instrument of cultural change ...”

- Richard Rorty

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