



# THE STORIES WE TELL MATTER

*HOW WE CHANGE THE STORY SO EVERYONE HAS A  
SAFE PLACE TO CALL HOME*



# What is narrative?

- *A Big Story*
- *A collection of stories that shape how we feel, think and act.*
- *Stories conveyed in politics, policy, news media, pop culture, social media, the bbq and dinner table.*
- *Narratives are like mosaics.*
- *Who tells the story has the POWER.*



# The Narrative of Homelessness

- We're in danger of losing the narrative.
- Dominant narrative is one of personal failing and criminalization.
- The public believes everyone should have a home but doesn't believe homelessness can be solved.







# YOUR TURN

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*WHAT ARE THE NARRATIVES IN YOUR COMMUNITY?  
WHAT DO YOU WANT THEM TO BE?*

# Housing Narrative Lab Narrative Research

## May 2021

### KEY FINDINGS

- Majority of people want elected officials to address housing and ensure everyone can afford a place to live.
- Challenge is focusing and sustaining attention (intensity) on the issue.
- Messaging needs to clearly articulate a positive vision of the future we can achieve.
- Base and persuadable audiences are drawn to solutions-focused and action-oriented messaging that makes our desired vision for the future both tangible and irresistible.



# LAB'S HOMELESSNESS NARRATIVE RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

## STRENGTHS



LEAD WITH VALUES: People support our core values



RACE: Explicit references to race test well.



INCLUSION: People also respond to inclusive language.



ROOT CAUSES: In the dials people respond positively when we connect the structural elements of systemic racism/income inequality to homelessness.

## WEAKNESSES



SOLUTIONS: Sensitivities for policies that raise taxes.



EFFICACY: Efficacy and cynicism is a big problem for us. People don't believe we can solve homelessness.



PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY: Even our base is somewhat responsive to opposition messaging based on personal responsibility and poor personal decisions.



ROOT CAUSES: • Systemic reasons for homelessness are not top associations, nor are a person's race/sexual orientation.





# Messages That Mobilize and Persuade

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*Swayable Test Findings*

# Mobilize: Housing First







# Housing First

Whether we're Black or white, Latino or Asian, Native or newcomer, most of us want the best for our families.

But not having a roof over your head, an address, or a place to shower -- or having to sacrifice putting food on the table in order to pay rent -- can make landing or keeping a job an impossibility.

Providing housing to people who have been pushed into homelessness is a proven approach that ensures people can rebuild their lives.

To make this a place where all of our families can thrive, we must rewrite the rules to ensure everyone has a place to call home.

# Persuade: Imagine A World





# Imagine A World

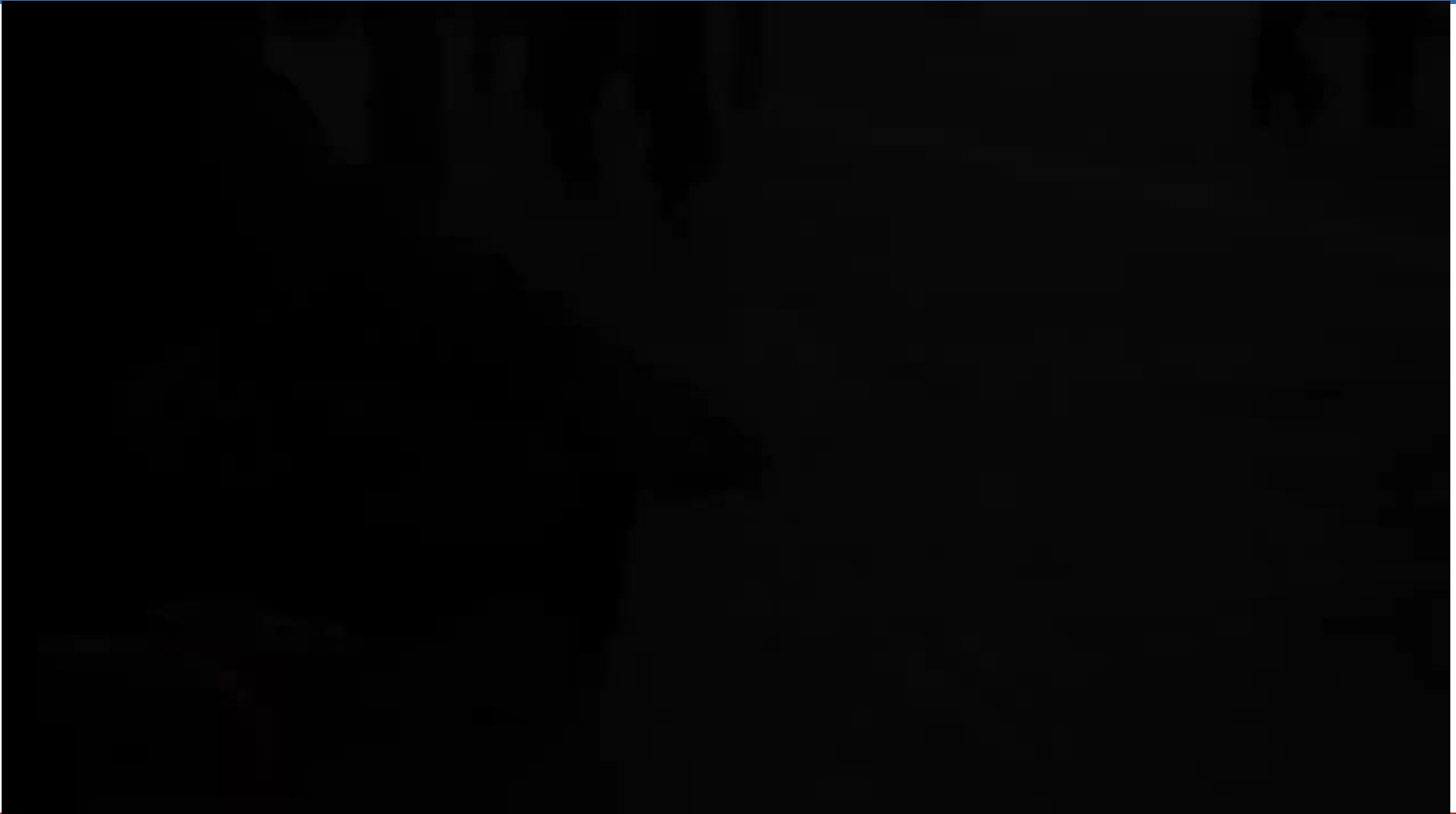
Imagine a world where no matter what we look like or where we come from, we can count on a roof over our heads.  
Where we can care for our families and enjoy being with them.

Right now, corporate landlords jack up rents keeping us divided, so a future for all of us seems out of reach.

But we can make a better world we imagine a reality, by joining together to make the wealthiest few pay their fair share.

So all of us can have the future we deserve.

# Persuade: Forced Into Homelessness





# Forced Into Homelessness

Some people see things simply -- like homelessness is only a personal choice.

And they say our government who works for us has no role in fixing it.

But most of us know, homelessness is not an American value.

Because no matter what we look like, every person deserves a safe, quality and affordable place to live.

And there are proven evidence-based strategies for how we deliver.

So everyone in our community has shelter.

# SIX TAKEAWAYS FOR YOUR WORK

## **ESTABLISH SHARED VALUE**

“no matter what we look like or where we come from, most of us want to provide for our families and know that hardship won’t mean homelessness”



# SIX TAKEAWAYS FOR YOUR WORK

**ESTABLISH SHARED VALUE**

**AVOID LEADING WITH THE WONK,  
NUMBERS, PROGRAM NAMES**

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**PROVIDE CONCRETE SOLUTION/  
EXPLAIN LIVED EXPERIENCE**



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EXPLAIN LIVED EXPERIENCE**

**CREATE UNITY OF PURPOSE**

## **NAME RACE:**

- ✓ “Whether we’re Black or white, Latino or Asian, Native or newcomer”
- ✓ “Whatever our color, background or zip code”

## **DESCRIBE PEOPLE WORKING TOGETHER:**

- ✓ “we must come together to rewrite the rules, regulate rents, and build options people can actually afford”
- ✓ “we can make the better world we imagine our reality by joining together”

# SIX TAKEAWAYS FOR YOUR WORK

ESTABLISH SHARED VALUE

AVOID LEADING WITH THE WONK,  
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PROVIDE CONCRETE SOLUTION/  
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CREATE UNITY OF PURPOSE

PROVIDE COMPELLING  
CALL TO ACTION

**BE CLEAR IN WHAT AND HOW  
THE PROVEN SOLUTIONS CAN  
BRING ABOUT CHANGE.**

- ✓ “together, we can demand proven solutions”
- ✓ “we all have a place to live our lives and raise our families.”
- ✓ “joining together to make the wealthiest few pay their fair share so all of us can have what we need.”

# NUMBER 1 TAKEAWAY

**BE CLEAR ON:**

**YOUR GOAL(S)**



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**AUDIENCE(S) YOU ARE TARGETING**

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**DIFFERENT MESSAGES MOVE  
DIFFERENT GROUPS**

# WORDS TO EMBRACE AND WORDS TO REPLACE

SAY THIS	INSTEAD OF	BECAUSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensuring everyone can afford a place to live</li><li>• Ensuring everyone has a place to live</li><li>• Ensuring every person has a roof over their heads</li><li>• Ensuring every family has a place to call home</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Making stable housing more affordable</li><li>• Creating programs that make housing affordable</li><li>• Developing affordable housing units</li></ul>	<p>Puts people front and center and personalizes this issue. We must consistently remind people that shelter is a basic human need, as our opposition tries to frame housing first and foremost as a commodity.</p> <p>We also must illustrate the positive outcome that we will achieve, which is far more compelling than the process we choose to get there.</p>
We need to solve homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ending homelessness</li><li>• Reducing homelessness</li></ul>	“Solving” implies that homelessness is a collective social problem we can tackle together, as opposed to an individual failing.
Local programs and services	Government programs and services	People are more favorable toward, and less cynical about, the ability of local programs and services to solve housing and homelessness issues.



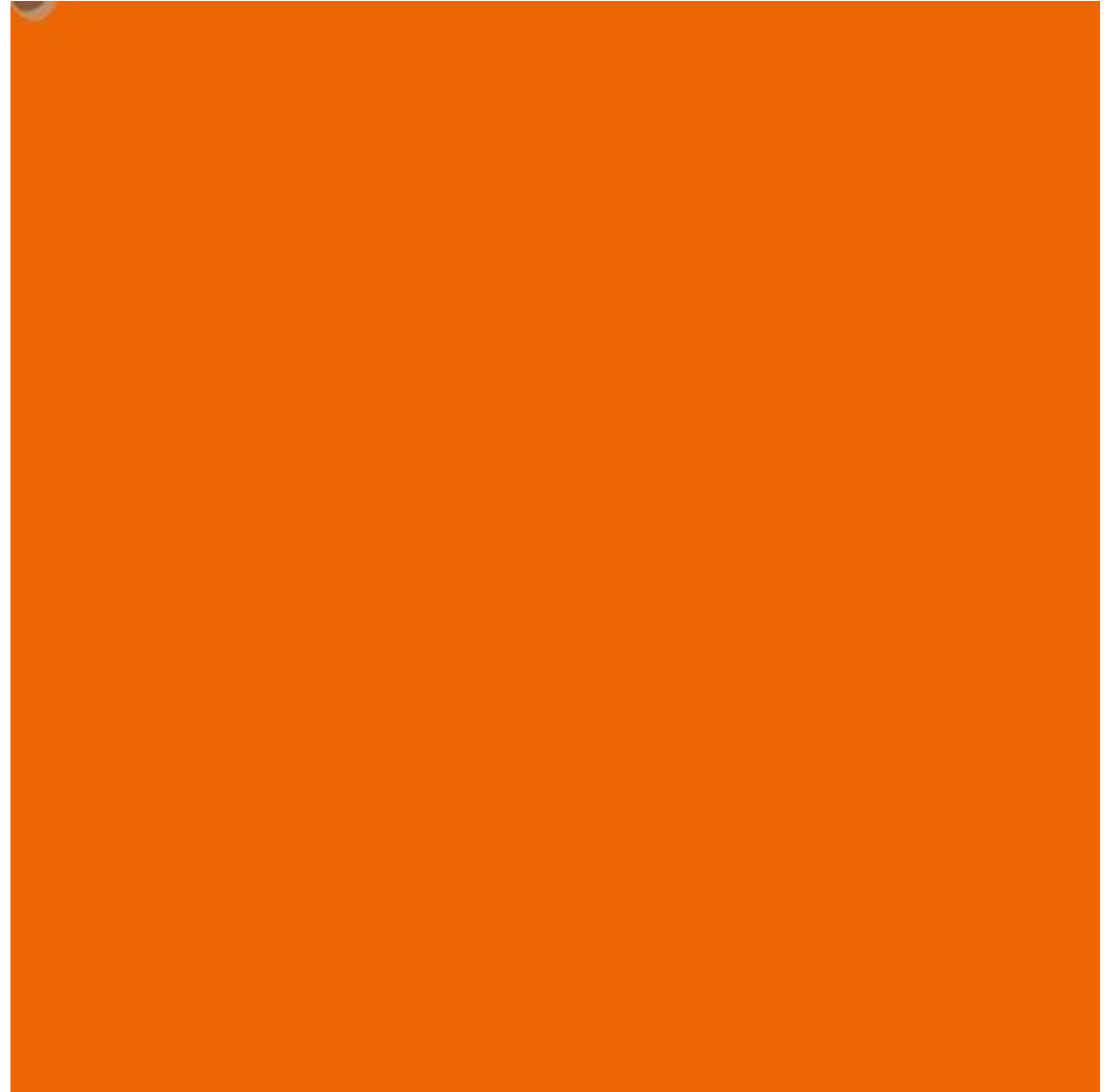
# WORDS TO EMBRACE AND WORDS TO REPLACE

SAY THIS	INSTEAD OF	BECAUSE
No matter what we look like or where we come from; whether we are white, black, Native Peoples or newcomer, Latine or Asian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Everyone, no exceptions</li><li>• No matter our income level</li></ul>	Centers race and origin, and with it, realities of discrimination and systemic inequities, instead of reinforcing the opposition's idea that housing issues are a product of income only, which primes individual solutions.
Increasing the minimum wage to a living wage	Increasing the minimum wage	At both the national and state level, base and persuadable adults are more likely to say increasing the minimum wage to a living wage is a top priority.
We need to solve homelessness because shelter is a human need	We need to solve homelessness because of the impact it has on our local businesses	Again, we must put people front and center and keep our audiences grounded in shelter as a human need, rather than priming a right-wing economic frame that obscures our humanity.

# Opportunities to Partner

We provide:

- Narrative Research
- Narrative Training/  
Education/  
Coaching
- Strategic  
Communications  
Support and  
Consulting
- Content Creation



# Questions?

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or

go to our website for more on  
research and messaging,  
[housingnarrativelab.org](http://housingnarrativelab.org).

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