Cutting through the Chaos

Reframing Public Health

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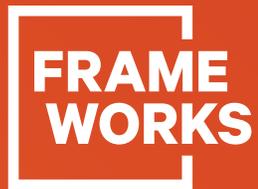
FRAME WORKS

FrameWorks is on a mission...

to advance the nonprofit sector's capacity
to **frame the public discourse** on social and scientific issues

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Legislature narrowly approves bill stripping authority from state, local public health officials

Critics denounce measure as misguided blowback in wake of COVID-19 pandemic

DeSantis administration scrubs 'equity' from state health priorities

WORKFORCE CHARACTERISTICS: RESEARCH REPORTS

The Role of Harassment in the Mental Well-being of Local Public Health Professionals and Its Relationship With an Intent to Leave Their Organization During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Bill proposed that makes giving an MRNA vaccine a misdemeanor

When the work gets harder,
it also gets more important.

Endlessly admiring the problem doesn't work

– An analysis of the problem/situation is essential to a strategic response - but it's only the first step

– Strategic responses can have downsides and still be the optimal thing to do

– "Seeking perfection is demoralizing. Seeking excellence is motivating."
 - Dr. Harriet Braiker

Avoiding controversial issues doesn't work

- A "spiral of silence" can start when there is a committed, vocal constituency with strongly held views

- As a view seems to become unpopular, supporters don't speak up

- Soon, all the voices we hear are on one side, skewing public opinion and political climate

- TL;DR: Staying out of "it" often makes "it" worse

"Spray and pray" messaging doesn't work

– One of the strongest predictors of what people believe is the number of times they have heard it

– When fields lack coordinated framing, they dilute their influence on public thinking and public discourse
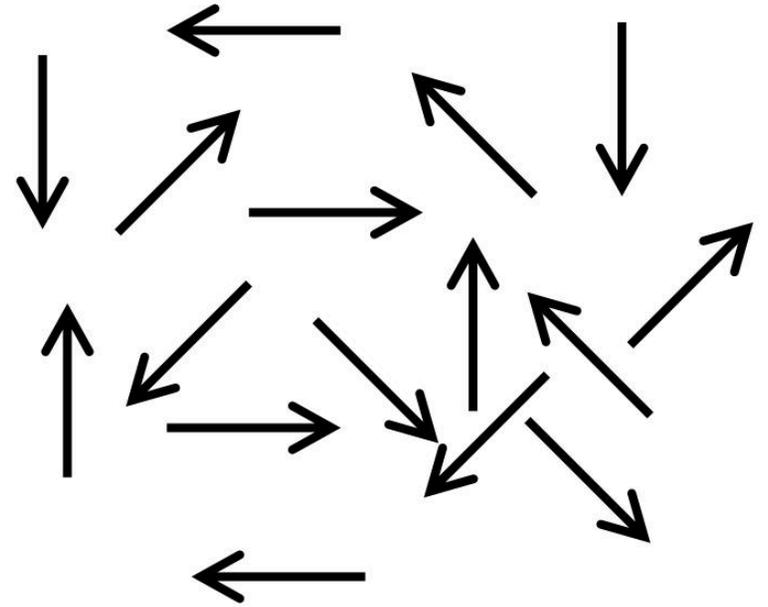
How can we shore up public health authority as some seek to erode it?

How can we strategically advance conversations about health equity in the face of efforts to suppress them?

How can we stand in solidarity with each other, although we are dispersed?

How can we reclaim and redirect misinformed conversations about vaccines and other science topics?

Keys to re-opening productive conversations

– Maintain strong framing fundamentals.

– Respond strategically when terms are politicized.

– Look for "side doors" into contested conversations.

– Organize with allies to deal with disinformation and divisiveness.

# Maintain strong framing fundamentals.

Policy is changed either via a change in a policymaker's mindset,
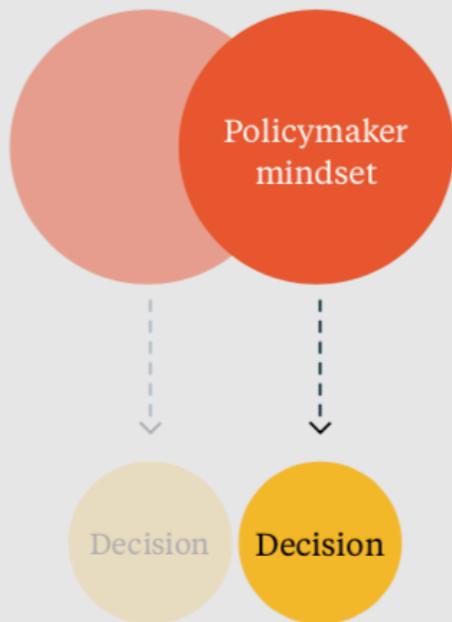
or when public mindsets create pressure on a policymaker to make a different decision.

Policymaker mindset

Decision

Decision

Changes in public mindsets

Policymaker incentives

Decision

Decision
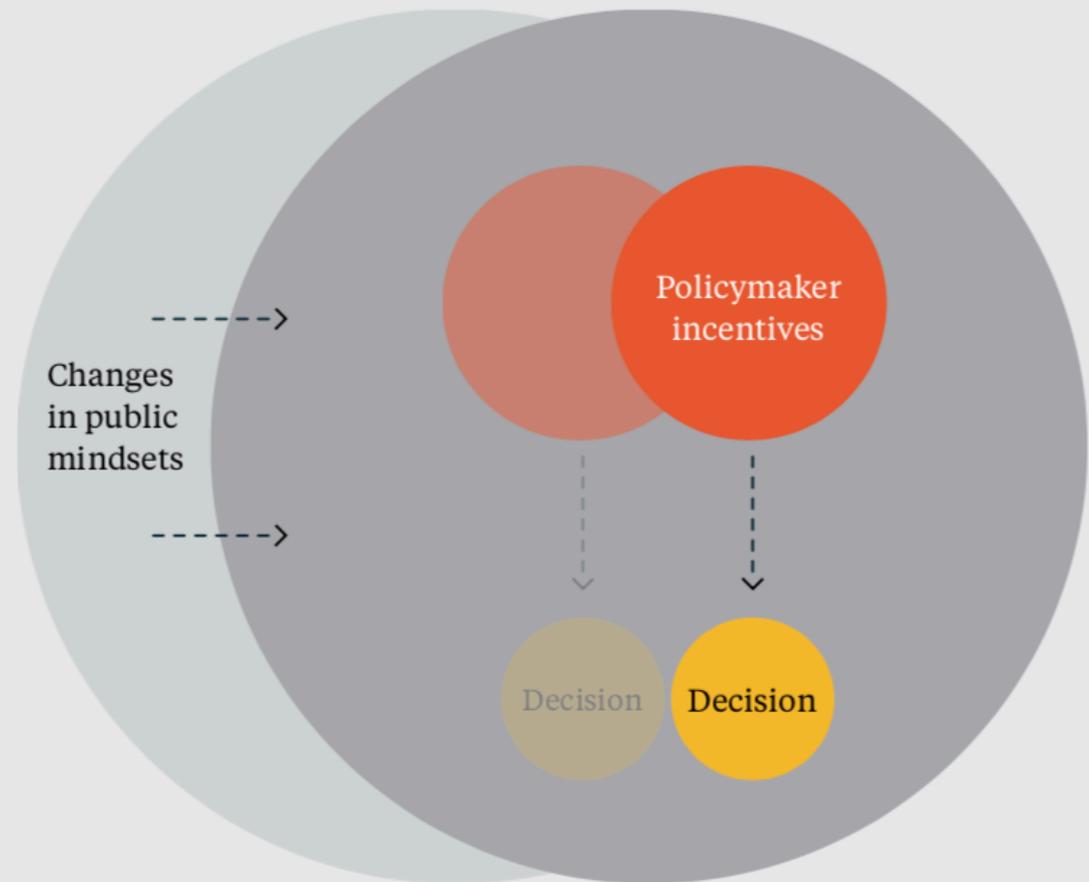
Strategic framing involves sets of choices

Tone	Values	Numbers
Metaphors	Narrative	Messengers
Examples	Context	Visuals
Order	Explanatory Chains	Solutions

We can change mindsets when we consistently use strategies like these:

- **Lead with why.** When we start out with a principle that society should uphold, we remind people of shared values and orient audiences toward the common good.

- **Build communications toward public health solutions.** When we get specific about what could be done to improve a situation, we establish a productive direction.

- **Position ourselves as reasonable partners in an important, inclusive conversation.** When we maintain an inviting tone, we can reduce "my-side bias."

- **Talk about public health in accessible, relatable terms.** When we use plain language and provide background, we invite the public into the conversation.

- **Tap into the "power of how."** When we explain rather than assert, we help to depoliticize issues and build broader support for sound policies.

Tone

Instead of "listen to the experts"

"Scientists who conduct research on vaccines overwhelmingly agree that immunizations make children safer, not less so."

▶

Try "let's talk about it"

"Whether we tend to vote red or blue, we all agree that children should stay healthy so they can focus on growing and learning."

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Plain language

Framed for other researchers

Reframed for the public

"The Pregnancy-Associated Mortality Review (PAMR) program was established to improve data collection and reporting of maternal deaths in Missouri."

▶

"When public health officials in Missouri noticed an increase in pregnancy-related deaths, we knew we had to take action."

Respond strategically when terms are politicized.

Think through the ideas the term is carrying

Is the idea helpful and productive?

- If you can, continue to use the term.

- Always explain what it means in plain, nonpartisan language.

- If you can't use the term, find a close synonym.

- Organize and strategize with allies.

▶

Is the idea harmful or unproductive?

- Don't repeat the term.

- Talk about the intent and/or impact of the harmful idea it represents.

- Organize and strategize with allies.

If necessary: change your words, not the work

Equity means fairness and justice. It involves ensuring that every individual and group gets what they need to thrive and participate fully in society. Achieving equity often asks us to rethink uniform, one-size-fits-all treatment. It sometimes involves devoting more or different resources in communities that face injustice, to correct imbalances caused by unfair treatment.

Health equity means that all people have a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. Achieving health equity requires:

· Valuing every person and their health fairly
· Addressing unfair practices and unjust conditions that can harm the health of specific groups in society
· Working with different groups in specific, sensitive ways to address health issues that affect them.

We want to ensure that everyone has a fair and full opportunity to be as healthy as possible, which requires:

· Valuing every person and their health

· Improving social conditions that can harm people's health

· Working with different groups in specific, sensitive ways to address health issues that affect them.

Remember there are many strategies for framing health equity

– **Attribute responsibility carefully.** Point to conditions, systems, and structures as the root causes of public health disparities.

– **Use a broad, generous "we."** Counter us-vs-them and zero-sum thinking using first-person plural language.

– **Advance an aspirational, values based-vision.** Talk about where we can go; paint a positive vision of a possible future.

Attribution of responsibility

Instead of "missing attribution"

"Every year, roughly 3,600 babies in the US die suddenly for unknown reasons. Researchers estimate that if expectant moms would just quit smoking, we could prevent 800 of those deaths."

▶

Try "systems responsibility"

"Researchers estimate that if we connect expecting families to treatment for nicotine dependency, we could prevent 800 infant deaths a year. "

Questions that yield answers, but not attribution

How do experts define this topic?

Which populations are affected?

What are the risk factors?

What are the protective factors?

What strategies are evidence based?

Where have proven strategies worked?

Questions that help us attribute responsibility

How is this a matter of justice & inclusion?

Which groups are harmed? Who benefits?

What uneven, unjust, or unfair policies or practices cause this problem?

How do powerful groups protect themselves from this risk?

What strategies would eliminate disparities?

Who leads in communities in this work?

Use a broad, generous "we"

framed with "othering" language

reframed with "togethering" language

Efforts to prevent isolation among the elderly population are critical.

→

We need ways to stay connected to our communities as we age.

Transition-age foster youth require supports beyond their 18th birthday.

→

We all need support in times of transition. Our young people in foster care are no exception.

Black women are up to three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related health complications than white women, even when controlling for socioeconomic status.

→

Every expecting mother should receive safe, respectful maternity care. We need to pay attention to the fact that Black women can't count on such care - and make sure they can.

Look for "side doors" into contested conversations.

Reframing childhood immunization

**The conversational "doors"
we've been using**

their rates of uptake

protection from disease

how vaccines fight disease

**"Side doors"
that are promising**

our responsibility for access

preparation for healthy childhood

how immune systems prepare themselves

"

REMOVE PRACTICAL BARRIERS TO ACCESS

"We must make sure that childhood vaccinations are widely available, easy to find, and affordable to everyone. Whether this means changing clinic locations or changing insurance reimbursement policies, we need to remove the barriers that families run into when trying to get kids vaccinated."

It matters how we talk about what "we" should do

We are failing
to get vaccinated

❌

We are failing
to provide access

❌
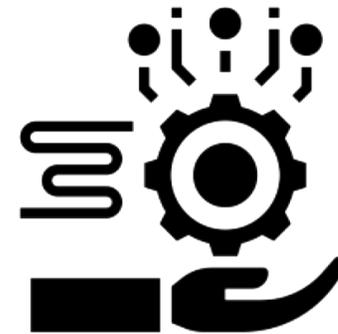
We have a responsibility
to provide access

✅

When we **compare gaining immunity to gaining literacy,** we tap into beliefs that the ability to read benefits both individuals and society, and that it's best to gain literacy in childhood.

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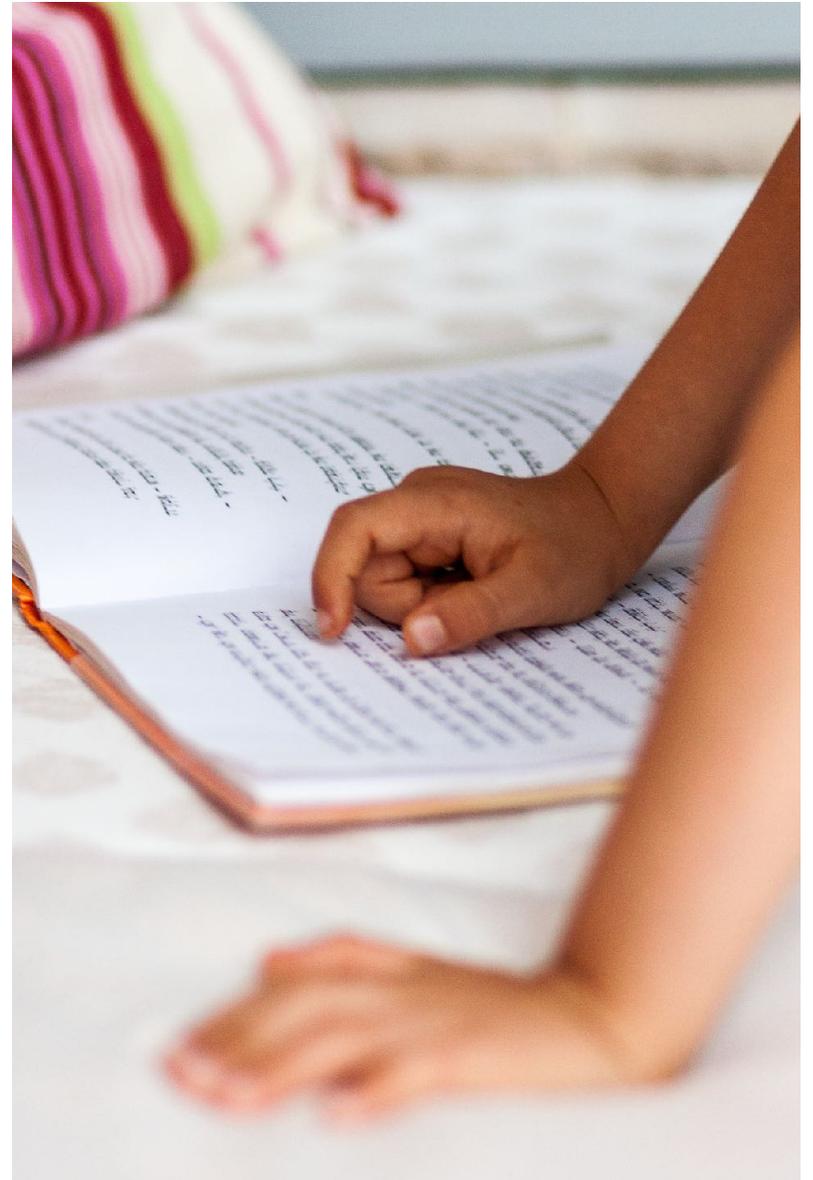
BEGINNER TEXTS / LITERACY

"When we immunize children, it's a lot like helping them learn to read. Vaccines are beginner texts that our immune systems use to practice comprehending a disease. With that literacy, they can read a disease more quickly when they encounter it—and respond and resist right away."

After exposure to the *Literacy* metaphor

Organize with allies to deal with disinformation and divisiveness.

Avoid these predictable communications traps

– **Don't react before you reflect.** Once misinformation is on the move, it's essential to respond strategically.

– **Don't restate myths or misinformation.** Repeating misinformation often reinforces it, even if the intent is to debunk it.

– **Don't get into dead-end debates about the "correct" definition of terms.** This can leave the impression that there are two sides to a valid argument.

When we try to counter misinformation with **paternalism**, we further erode public trust in institutions and evidence.

Dealing with disinformation and divisiveness

– **Set your intention strategically.** In most instances, your goal isn't to convince the vocal vector that they are wrong. It is to inoculate others against their harmful ideas.

– **Prepare key messages and keep things simple.** State the truth in clear, concise terms. Explain why it is true and why you believe it to be true.

– **Name the disinformation strategy and worry aloud about its impact.** Offer a way to understand *why* the disinformation is untrue and why the disinfo tactic matters.

  – "The untrue messages that some are repeating are based on taking a data point out of context. I worry that this misleads people and reinforces harmful stereotypes."

  – "Personal attacks and accusations distract us and add to an atmosphere of suspicion. I would rather see a careful consideration of ideas that can lead us in a productive direction."
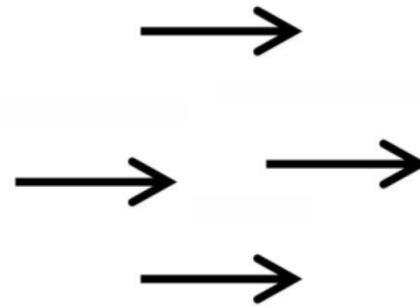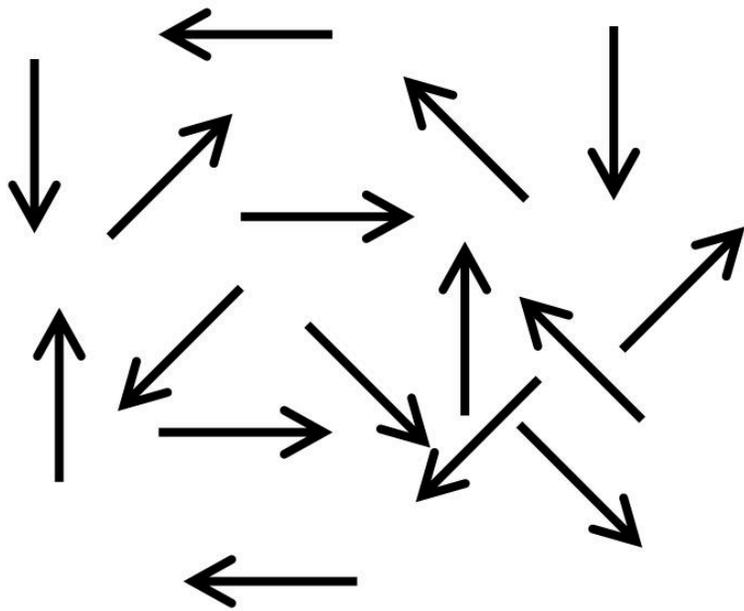
Reactions? Questions?

Thank you!
Let's continue the conversation.

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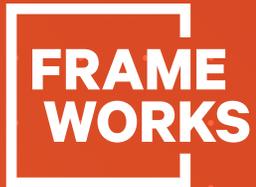
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About FrameWorks

The FrameWorks Institute is a nonprofit think tank that advances the mission-driven sector's capacity to frame the public discourse about social and scientific issues. The organization's signature approach, Strategic Frame Analysis®, offers empirical guidance on what to say, how to say it, and what to leave unsaid. FrameWorks designs, conducts, and publishes multi-method, multidisciplinary framing research to prepare experts and advocates to expand their constituencies, to build public will, and to further public understanding. To make sure this research drives social change, FrameWorks supports partners in reframing, through strategic consultation, campaign design, FrameChecks®, toolkits, online courses, and in-depth learning engagements known as FrameLabs. In 2015, FrameWorks was named one of nine organizations worldwide to receive the MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions.

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