



February, 2019

Useful Community Development... quick notes

Inside: Reframing Your Conversations about Issues, Using Housing Affordability as an Example

Visit us and explore at <https://www.useful-community-development.org>.

Enjoy Some Revisions and Updates

This month we've updated a ton of pages on our website to make sure they reflect current thinking and research. It's amazing that some topics have changed very little in the past 12-18 months, while others have witnessed rapid innovation.

Please check out one of these randomly chosen new-old pages that matches your interests: [Neighborhood Newsletter](#), [Housing Condition Survey](#), [Abandoned Homes](#), [Streetscape Programs](#), [Sign Regulation](#), [Causes of Urban Sprawl](#), [Mixed-Use Development](#), [Rural Zoning](#), [Small Town Character](#).

Feature Story: Reframing the Issue May Be Your Best Bet



If you have a good cause, but yet your message isn't finding public acceptance, perhaps you need to try reframing. Think of moving an empty picture frame across a large photo until you find just the right content to show off the photo to its best advantage. If you are digitally inclined, it's like cropping a photo.

While often used to discuss better and worse terminology to use in your communications, we also think reframing can mean making sure that you're solving the right problem--the one that you and the public really care about.

Let's take an example from the housing affordability issue. We find the Enterprise Community Partners [reframing project on affordable housing](#) to be particularly refreshing. On behalf of Enterprise, an organization called FrameWorks tested values-based arguments about affordable housing. Only two were promising.

They called one Regional Interdependence, which is a type of argument that we have been finding quite persuasive. We might say something like there is less prosperity and less disposable income overall in the region if some people have to pay too much for housing. Likewise when it comes to housing, we could say that it harms all of us if our teachers, police, and first-year professionals cannot afford housing except in outer suburbia where they clog the roads just trying to get to work.

The second housing affordability notion that tested well was Fairness Across Places. By taking the focus off of individual merit or lack thereof, and talking instead about equality of advantages across zip codes, we plug into "liberty and justice for all," as the American pledge of allegiance says.

The research suggests that we should de-emphasize affordability to one household, which too often gets tangled up with making judgments about a particular stereotypical household. Instead we can talk about housing costs outpacing wages in the overall community. Is it a subtle change? Yes. But will it work better if we heed the research on how people receive messages? We think so.

We'll be revamping a couple of pages of our website based on this interesting read. The good news is that if housing affordability isn't your cause, FrameWorks Institute has worked on some other issues too, including the economy, children and families, education, the environment, human services, and government. Check them out [here](#).

Incidentally, we can't leave this without pointing out some outstanding FrameWorks recommendations on messages relevant to rural communities. These [positive and negative ways of talking about rural issues](#) will make you smile or cringe.

Great Resource for Free Online Non-Profit Training

Let's say you're a new Executive Director of a non-profit organization, or even a board member. You have zero money to spend on training; yet there's so much you still need to learn. One answer could be [NonprofitReady](#), which offers more than 400 free courses. This is a project of the well-respected Cornerstone OnDemand Foundation.

New on Our Website This month we posted a new article on [spring newsletter ideas](#) and plan to follow up with ideas for e-mails or newsletters for the other three seasons this year also. Also we answered these questions about a neighbor [not obtaining a building permit due to nonconforming zoning](#), [whether a building on an approved site plan has to conform to new zoning code provisions](#), and a [deed restriction that just became known after six years](#).

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