



Making the Case for Social Support Programs

County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA)

2014 Conference – October 10, 2014

Patrick Bresette – pbresette@publicworks.org

**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.



This is not about:

- “Liking” the government as it is, or telling people “government is good”
- Making excuses for government when it does not work
- “Big” government or “small” government

This is about:

- Recognizing the unique role of government in society
- Aspiring to create the government we need & deserve
- Public systems and structures that are essential to quality of life

The Work of Public Works

Research

- Government
- The Economy
- Budgets & Taxes

In the Field

- Policy Organizations
- Public Workers
- Public Officials
- Advocates
- Organizers



Today's Session:

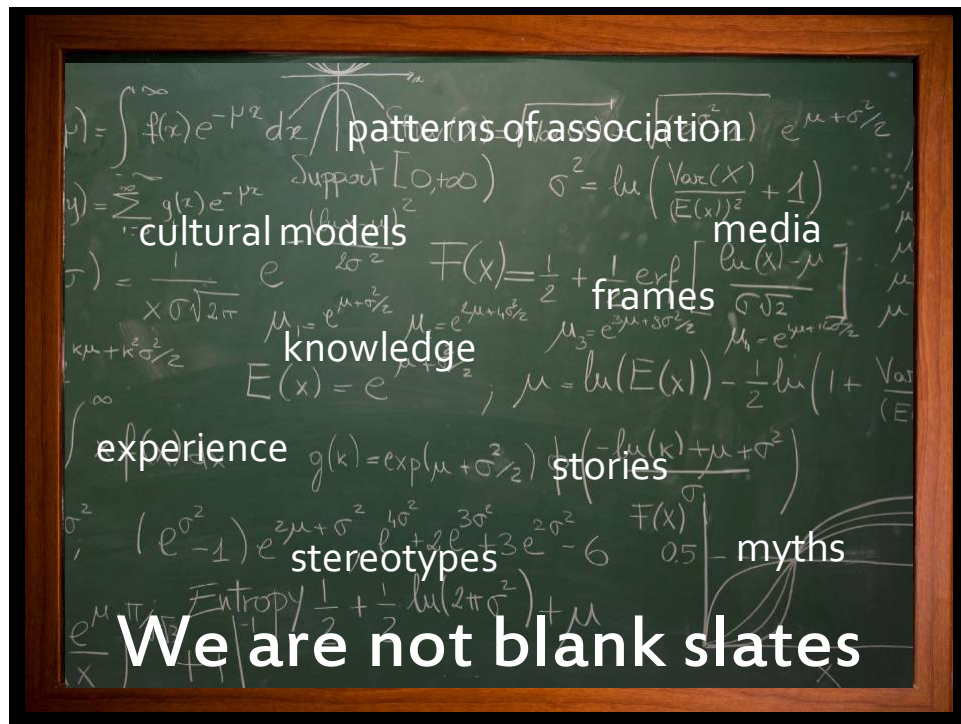
How do we help the public understand the value and purpose of public support programs?

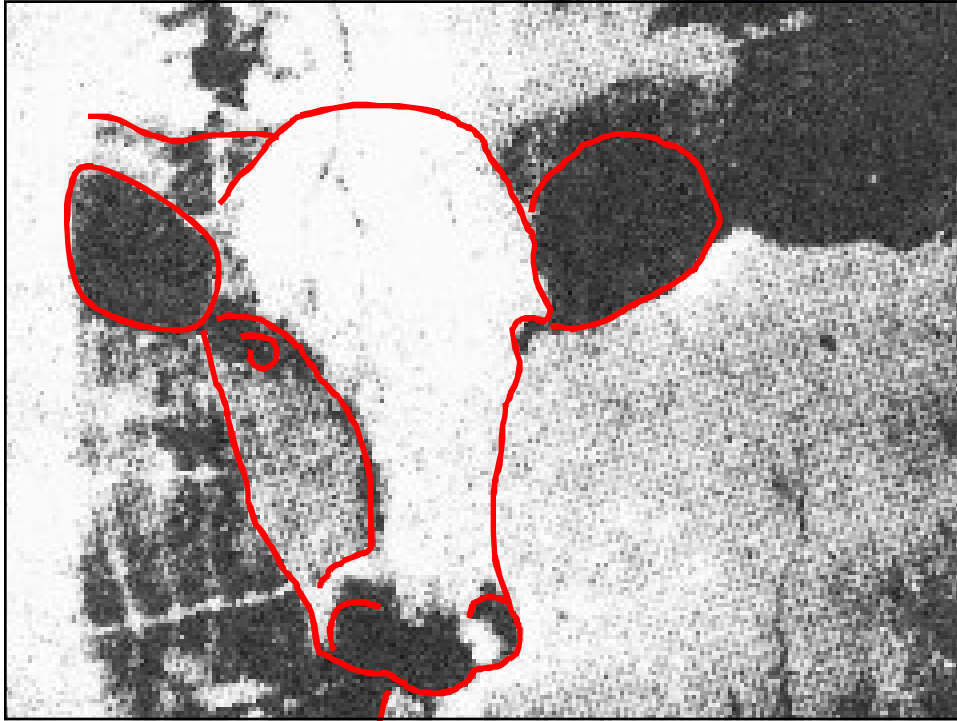
A Tangled Knot of Public Perceptions

- **Poverty**
- **Government**
- **The Economy**

So . . . what are our
dominant stories about
poverty, government,
and the **economy**. . . ?

And how do they impact
public understanding and
support?





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

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”*



13

DOVEDTV

RQYFPTX

**The
Poverty
Knot**



When we try to talk about social support programs . . .

WORK HARDER!
MILLIONS ON WELFARE
DEPEND ON YOU !

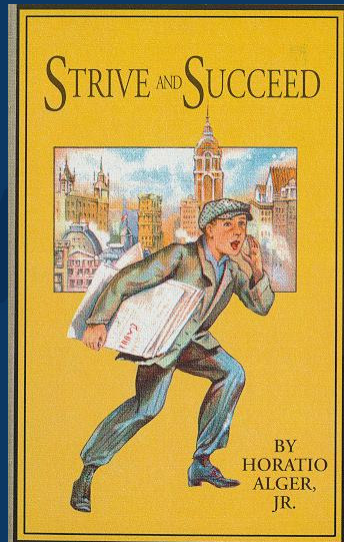
. . . we run up against powerful cultural narratives about poverty and “poor people” and government as the “Nanny State.”

Untangling this knot of public perceptions and misperceptions is a central task.

“Receiving food stamps has become an unfortunate American pastime. Since the housing bust and subsequent financial crisis threw millions out of work, many have turned to the dole. The number of Americans on food stamps has reached record numbers. [This] food stamps phenomenon [is] yet another instance of government-enforced dependency . . .”

<http://millergd.blogspot.com/2012/04/should-libertarians-accept-food-stamps.html>

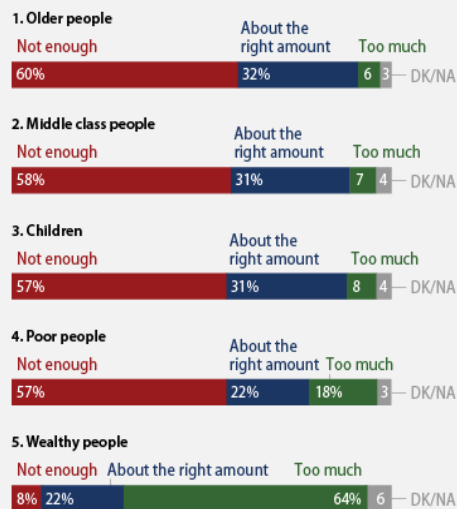
Narratives We're up Against



Poverty is....

- a result of poor choices or bad morals
- not as bad as it used to be or as it is elsewhere
- a temporary state because of America's unique economic mobility
- not solvable and attempting to solve it will be expensive and will cause dependence

Do you think the government does too much, not enough, or about the right amount for the following people?



Source: Sept. 22-Oct. 4, 2011 Pew poll.

But . . .

people also believe government is not doing enough for those most effected by economic hardship.

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

21

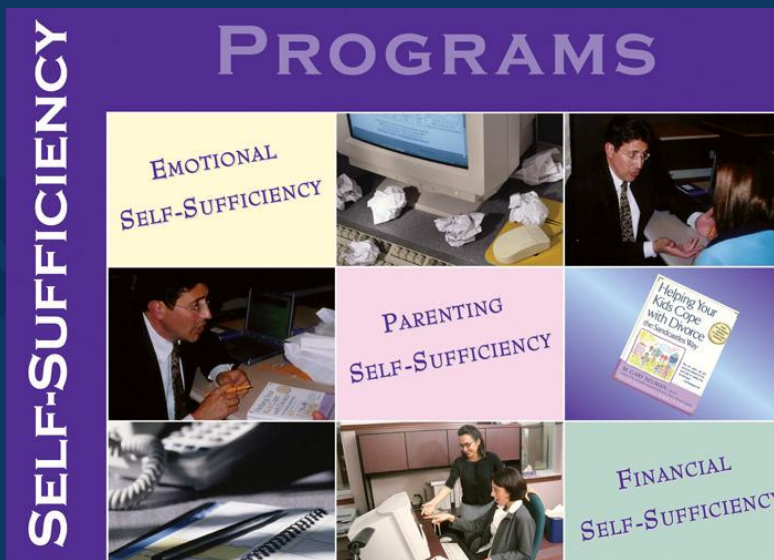
Whenever we engage in public debates we may think of ourselves as conduits of information. However, our audiences think about those same policies, issues, and programs in terms of the background story — ***the master narrative*** — that lies beneath our bullet-points, facts, statistics, and legal citations.

22

The Triumphant Individual	The Benevolent Community
 <p data-bbox="444 852 699 873">"Self-Made Man" – Irene Ritter</p>	 <p data-bbox="1127 852 1281 873">Dave Kolpack / AP</p>
Independence	Interdependence

Individual Problem	Collective Problem
	
Personal Solutions	Structural Solutions

Which story are we reinforcing?



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

ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE INITIATIVE

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](#)

Erika Shultz / The Seattle Times

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.**

Don't "Otherize" . . .

- Avoid talking about "the poor" (*or participants in your programs*) in ways that sets them apart as "not like the rest of us"
- Avoid the three P's—poverty as poison, plague, or paradox—and similar distancing language
- Avoid language that suggests "the poor" are categorically distinct from groups like the "working class" or "middle class"

Adapted from remarks by Shawn Fremstad

Are we talking about “Us” or “*Them*”



- vulnerable children
- struggling families
- poor neighborhoods
- disadvantaged populations

29

Widening The Circle of Concern

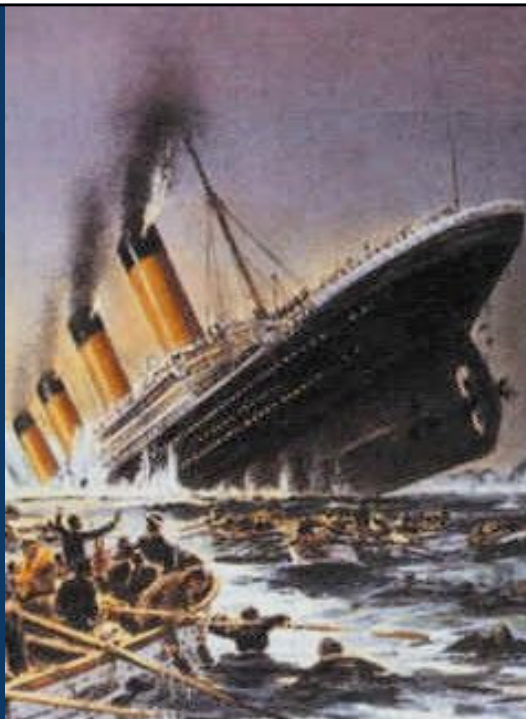


The central challenge for modern, diversifying societies is to create a new, broader sense of **“we.”**

- Robert Putnam

31

Be Careful
of Crisis
Stories





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.**

We know that **communities are stronger and healthier** when at-risk families 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.

Do not cue up stereotypes in an effort to refute them

"People assume that women in TANF are **stupid, lazy, inarticulate and passive**—and that couldn't be further from the truth," says Chilton. "These ladies may not think of themselves as entrepreneurs, but they are, and they can make a huge difference in their own lives and communities if the environment were right. TANF is not setting up the right environment."

<http://www.thenation.com/blog/167381/week-poverty-will-pennsylvania-rip-another-hole-safety-net>

Portrait



Landscape

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

(adapted from Iyengar, 1990).

Ripple Effects

How do your programs impact community well-being?

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced today that more than one in eight Oregon households (13.1 percent) struggled to put food on the table at times during 2006-08. Oregon's rate of food insecurity was unchanged from 2003-05 and not significantly different from the national rate for 2006-08.

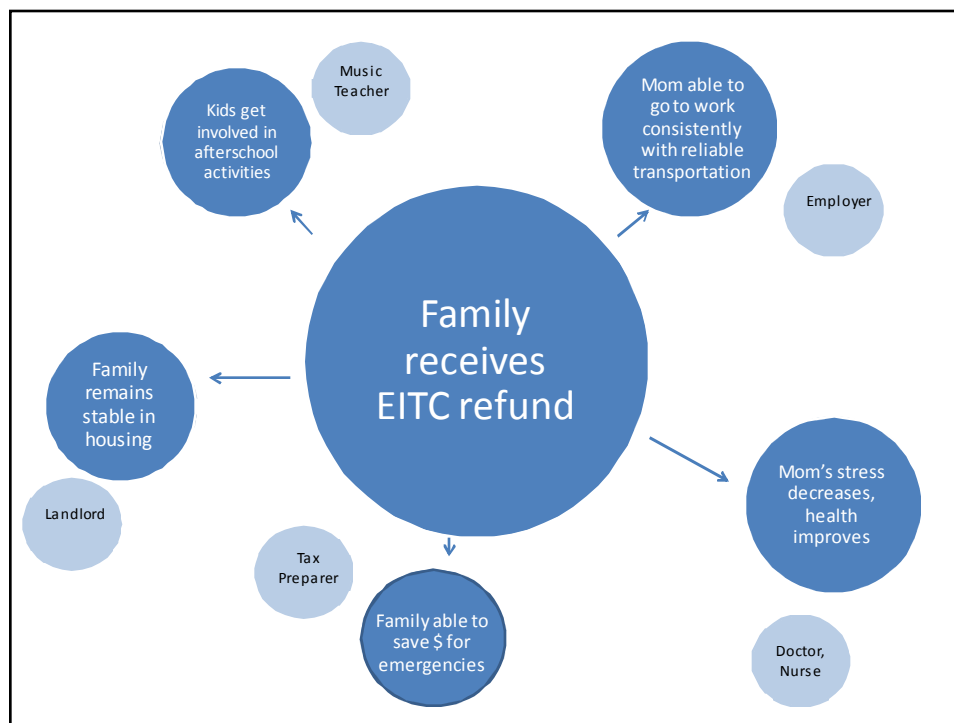
But the share of Oregon households experiencing hunger, "very low food security," increased to 6.6 percent (one in 15 Oregon households) in 2006-2008, up from 3.9 percent in 2003-05. Among the 50 states and the District of Columbia, Oregon and Mississippi had the largest percentage point increases in their rates of very low food security.

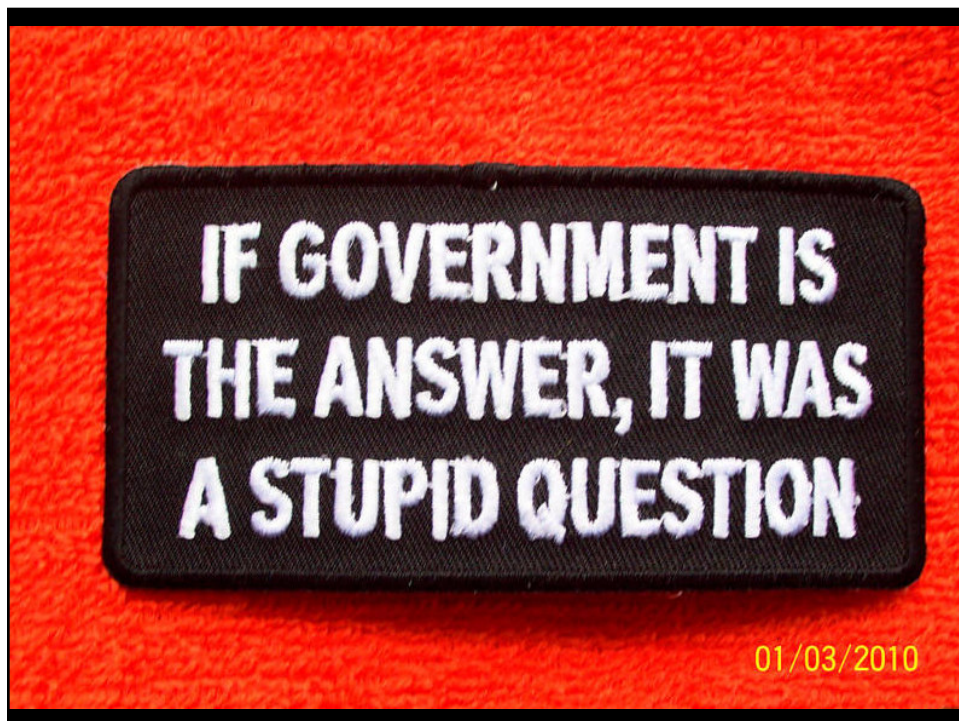
The nation as a whole saw increases in both food insecurity and hunger or very low food insecurity in 2008 compared to 2007. Because it is necessary to combine three years of data to get reliable state-level estimates, the picture at the state level is not as clear.

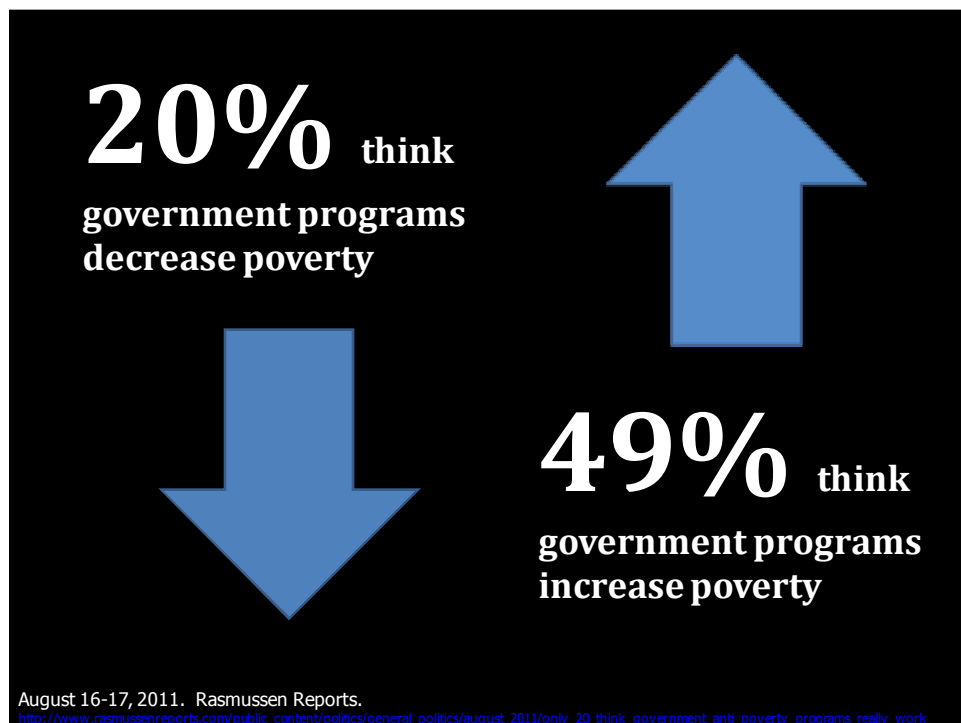
The lush red strawberries caught the attention of Rachel Patrick, a mother of five shopping at a farmers market along the Mississippi River here. She selected two cartons and ignited a little-noticed chain reaction that is an important part of President Barack Obama's economic stimulus plan.

Ms. Patrick handed a plastic card loaded with her monthly food-stamp allocation to farmer Ed Kraklio Jr., who swiped it through his electronic reader. Mr. Kraklio now regularly takes in several hundred dollars a month from food-stamp sales, a vital new revenue stream that has allowed him to hire another assistant to help tend a cornucopia of fruits and vegetables. The new worker, in turn, spends her income in nearby stores, restaurants and gas stations. . .

The president's stimulus plan . . . has put more money into the hands of the poorest Americans by boosting monthly food-stamp allocations. Starting in April, a family of four on food stamps received an average of \$80 extra. Money from the program -- officially known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program -- percolates quickly through the economy.





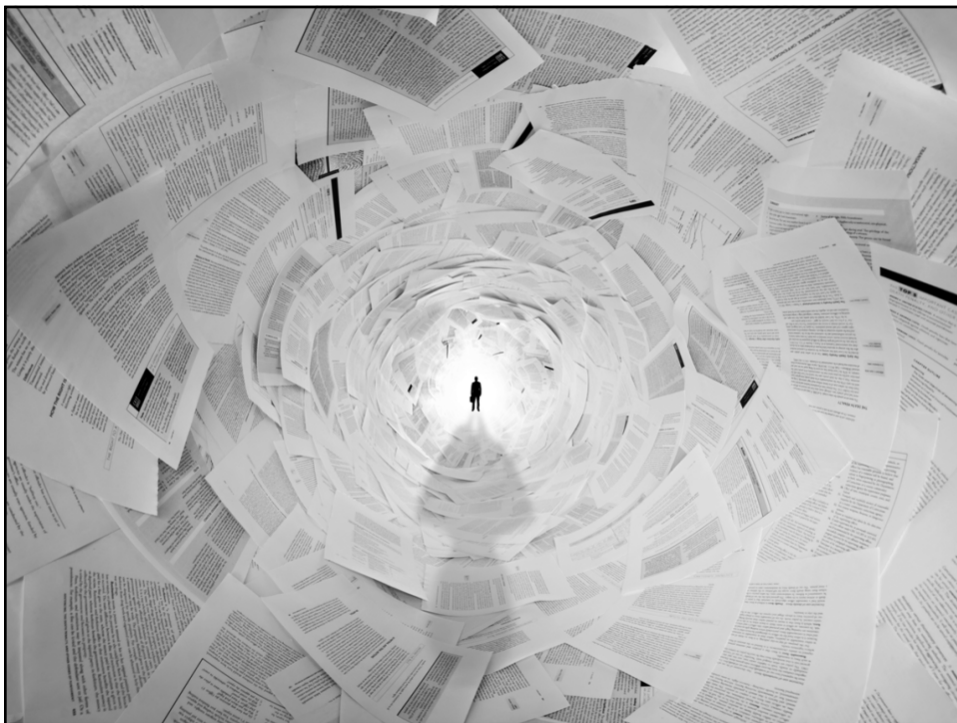
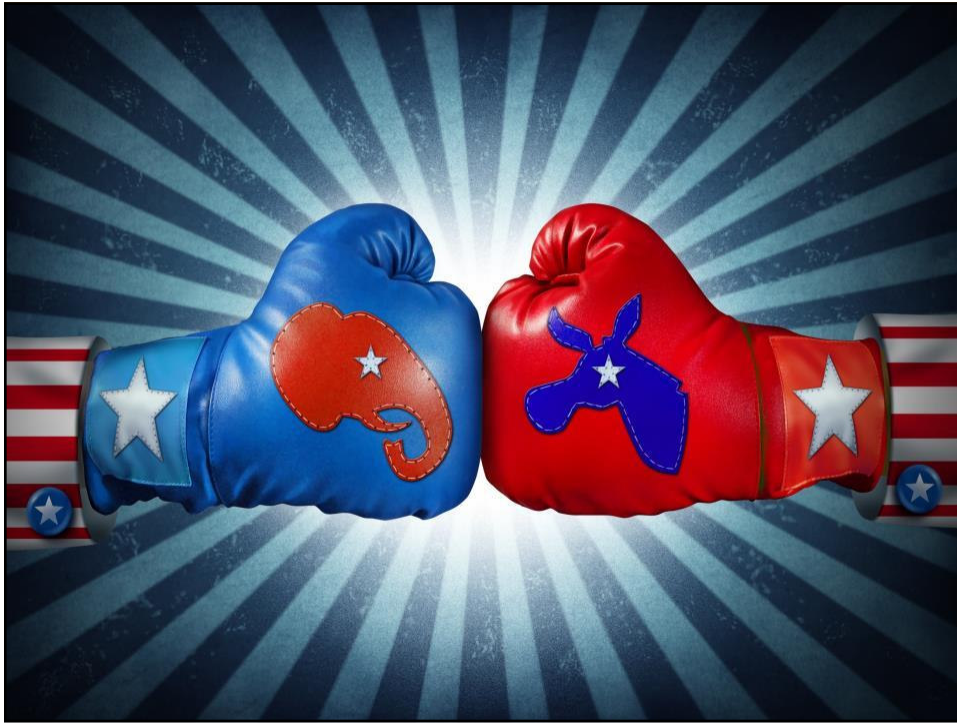


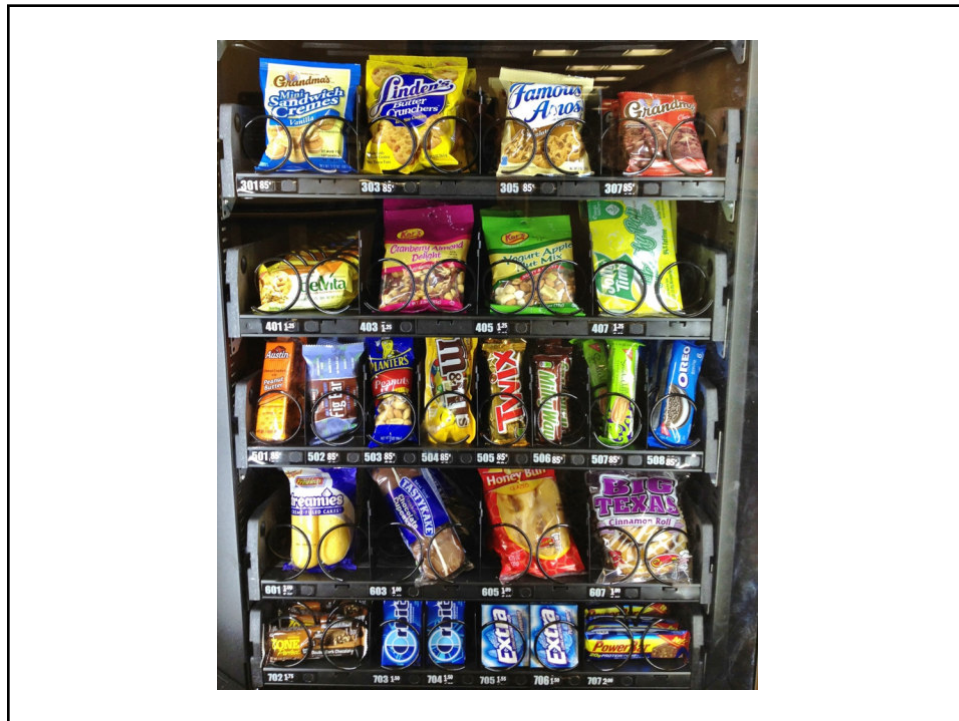
Discussion

- How do attitudes in about government here in California influence attitudes about your programs?
- How would you articulate why these services are a *public* priority, and an important role for government?

47







“Racial labels perform a decisive function in public debate. In particular, race is a dividing line that is used to define the “other”, and, by implication, define the “undeserving other” and undermine public support for public welfare programs.”

-Talking the Walk





Mission and Purpose

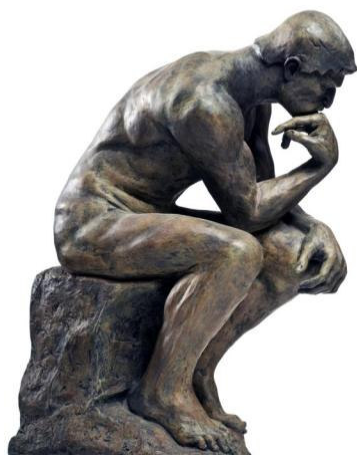
VALUES	ROLE
• Common Good	• Protector
• Quality of Life	• Manager & Planner
• Community Wellbeing	• Steward
• Public Purpose	• Consensus-BUILDER

Public Works

54



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.



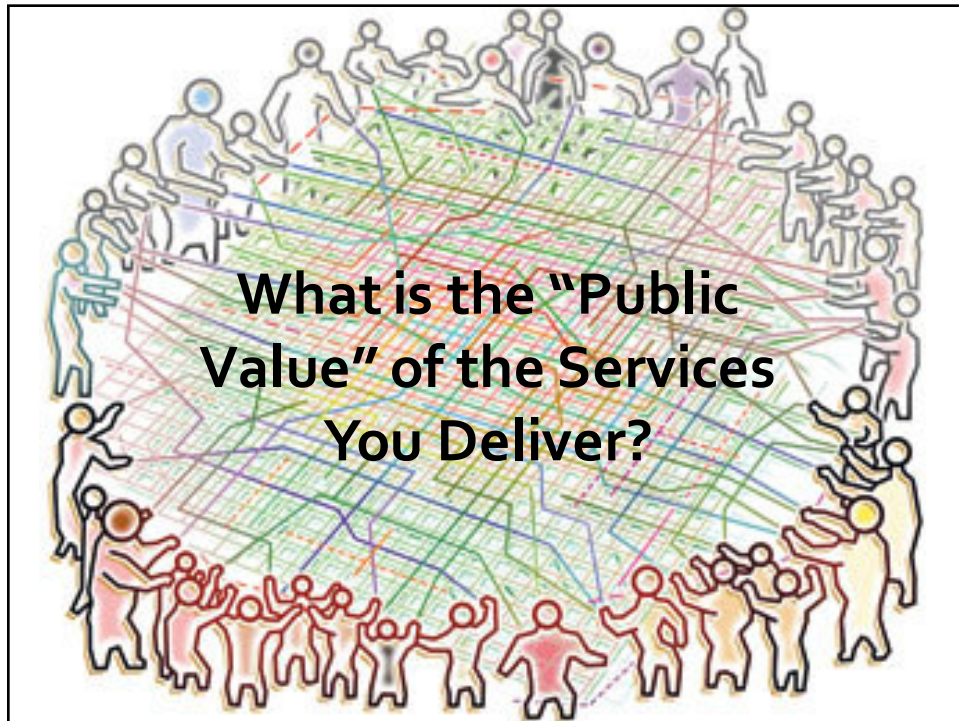
Why does this matter?

“Every child should have access to immunizations but too many families in our community are not bringing their children in to our clinics. This is why we are proposing a new agency rule requiring more clinic hours . . .”

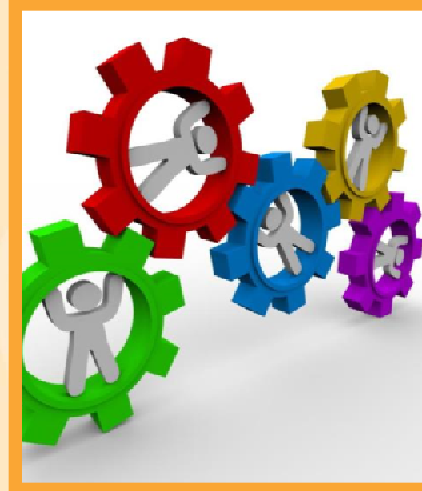
Speak to Values First

“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. ”





Systems and Structures



Fostering “Citizen Managers”



- Interdependence
- Working together
- Problem-solving
- Everyone has a role to play
- The Common Interest
- “Our” Government

Dominant Stories about Government



Just Politics



Bureaucracy



Vending Machine

New Stories about Government



Mission & Purpose

Systems & Structures

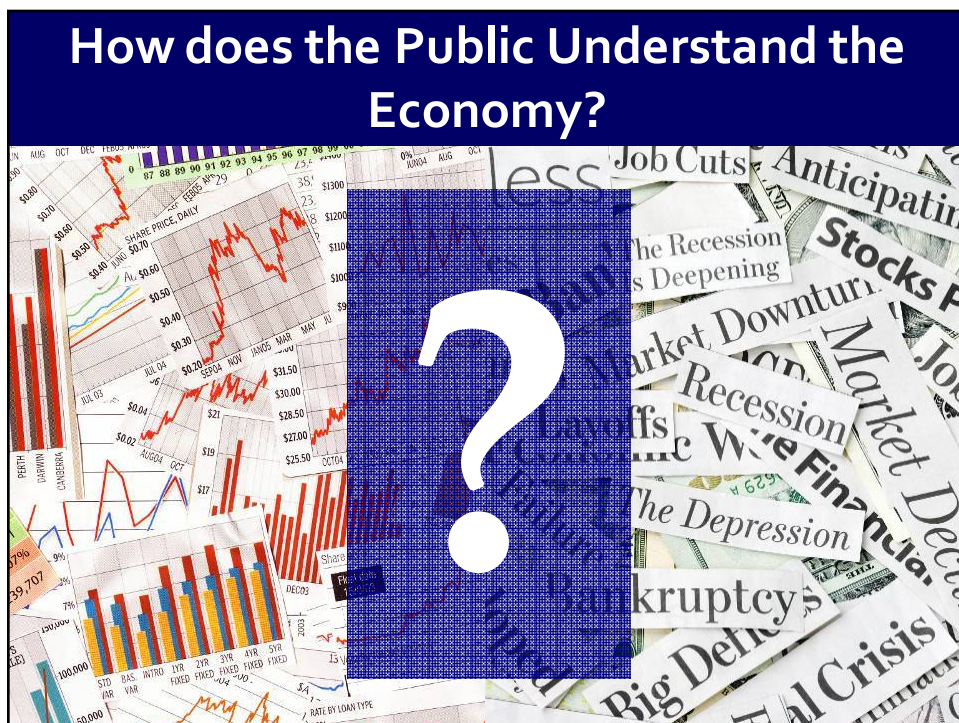
Citizenship



67

The Core Idea we Must get Across . . .

The public systems and structures we build and maintain together are essential to our quality of life; they are the foundation of a strong economy and critical to broadly shared prosperity . . .



A "Natural Economy"

Based on this latest survey, most Americans believe that the U.S. economy won't reach **placid waters** for some time. But as they struggle to **steer through the rapids**, each major group in society increasingly appears to be piling into its own boat. And more and more of us feel as if we are paddling alone.

Paddling Alone: On The Economic Rapids
Allstate/National Journal Poll - Oct. 10, 2009



The Individual Actor Model

Implications:

- A broadly shared model
- Moral qualities and personal choices shape economic actions and outcomes



73

Suspicious of Governmental Role



Last Resort

Dependency

Stifles Business

74

Shaping Economic Outcomes



Policy?



Hard Work!

Connecting the Dots

✓ *Purpose*

- What is the Economy for?

✓ *Intentionality*

- How do we create the Economy we desire?



**We can build the
economy we need**

- The economy is manmade
- It rests on a foundation of public systems and structures
- Public investments are crucial to shared prosperity

Making the Case for Social Support Programs

Takeaways?

- Poverty . . .
- Government . . .
- The Economy . . .

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

- Richard Rorty

Related Links & Resources

Lots of links about framing and narrative:

<http://www.publicworks.org/framing-library/>

john powell on “belongingness” and poverty:

<http://www.nwaf.org/content/uploads/oldsite/FileCabinet/DocumentCatalogFiles/Other/PMpowell.pdf>

Downloadable worksheets:

<http://www.publicworks.org/new-worksheets-hone-communications-skills/>