

The power of telling your story & strategic framing in advocacy

American Public Health Association

Katherine Schaff, DrPH, MPH

My parents grew up without a lot of financial stability in rural areas, but worked hard and were able to buy a house.

My dad was a manual laborer who worked hard so my sister and I could have opportunities that he and my mom never had.

Even in tough times, they were financially savvy and kept food on the table and a roof over our heads.

I pushed myself in school to do my best while also working after school and participating in band, theater, and other activities.

I've had health issues most of my life, but I've still accomplished a lot.

I'm a first generation college student and worked hard to get my doctorate in public health at U.C. Berkeley

My parents grew up without a lot of financial stability in rural counties, but worked hard and were able to buy a house.

The Army Bill helped my dad buy his first house and he didn't face housing discrimination, red-lining, or other policies that limited where he could buy.

My dad was a manual laborer who worked hard so my sister and I could have opportunities that he and my mom never had.

His union helped ensure workers had good health insurance and I was able to get treated for ear infections and migraines.

Even in tough times, they were financially savvy and kept us housed and fed.

My parents could access a good credit union and the union offered some financial support during strikes. Even though it was a lower-wage manual labor job, my dad was able to get stock options that are helping them in retirement.

I pushed myself in school to do my best while also working after school and participating in band, theater, and other activities.

My publicly funded schools provided honors classes, band, theater, and other opportunities for students.

I've had health issues most of my life, but I've still accomplished a lot.

I've almost always had health insurance through my parents or my work. I identify as white, and faced fewer barriers to getting good jobs.

I'm a first-generation college student and worked hard to get my doctorate in public health at U.C. Berkeley.

I attended a publicly funded graduate school, qualified for work-study, had some of my student loans forgiven, and received financial aid. Now I can use what I've learned to try to improve public health.

The background of the slide is a blurred photograph of a crowd of people. In the foreground, the back of a person's head with dark braided hair is visible. A hand is raised in the center of the frame, palm facing forward. Other people are visible in the background, some looking towards the camera and others looking away.

berkeley media studies group

BMSG is grounded in a vision of health, safety, justice, dignity, and joy for everyone.

We support advocates as they communicate strategically about their work to build power and achieve equity.





what we do

- **Conduct media research**
- **Train advocates**
- **Provide resources for journalists**



in son.
history, what and the public
has considered "newsworthy" has met different definitions. For example, mid-twenty
mains on political and
ever, the news media

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Overview of tools that can help you:

- Ensure your stories are aligned with overarching **goals**.
- Apply **equity-focused narrative change** approaches to storytelling.
- Shift from **portrait to landscape** stories that spotlight systemic issues and population-level solutions.

Lesson 1: Message is never first

Before you know what you want to **SAY**...
...you have to know what you want to **DO**.

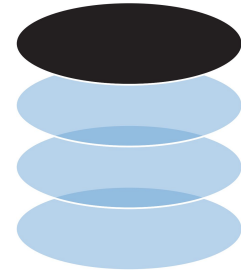
You can't have a message strategy without an overall strategy.

**layers
of
strategy**



Overall strategy

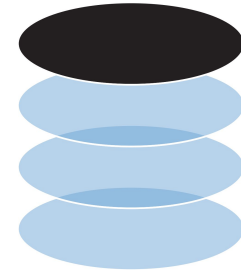
- ➡ Define the **problem** you want to address
- ➡ Clarify the **solution** for which you'll advocate
- ➡ Identify the **target** with the power to make the change
- ➡ Enlist the **allies** who can help make your case
- ➡ Identify what **actions** you'll take to influence the target



Overall strategy example

- ➔ **Problem:** Evictions during early months of COVID-19 pandemic
- ➔ **Solution:** Pass an equity-focused county eviction protection package to keep people housed
- ➔ **Target:** County Board of Supervisors
- ➔ **Allies:** Local grassroots groups (legal, faith, housing, immigrant rights), public health organizations, etc.
- ➔ **Actions:** petitions, public comment, op-ed, social media, etc.

Based on work by the Vallejo Housing Justice Coalition and other community organizers in Solano County



Your **overall strategy must center racial and health equity** if you want your communications strategy to advance racial and health equity.

San Francisco Chronicle

e-EditionAccount

BAY AREA // REAL ESTATE

Black Bay Area residents own homes at half the rate of white neighbors. Could \$500 million help change that?

 Lauren Hepler

June 30, 2022 | Updated: July 3, 2022 4 p.m.

Gift this article



 Save





Darris Young, an impact manager at the Bay Area Regional Health Inequalities Initiative, at San Pablo Berkeley Park. Young, 60, grew up in Berkeley but has seen many friends and family members move to more affordable nearby cities or cross-country destinations like Atlanta.

Yalonda R. James/The Chronicle

Health-supporting policy

Our problem

Opposition to health-supporting policy

10. Decision making power or influence

Decision makers

Decision makers

Decision makers

Decision makers

Decision makers

8. Active participant in decision-making

Influences decision maker

Influences decision maker

Influences decision maker

6. Power to have influence over decision-making

ALLIES

ALLIES

UNORGANIZED ALLIES/ OPPOSITION

OPPOSED TO POLICY

4. Taken into account

ALLIES

UNORGANIZED ALLIES/ OPPOSITION

UNORGANIZED ALLIES/ OPPOSITION

OPPOSED TO POLICY

3. Can get attention

2. Not on radar

+3

+2

+1

-1

-2

-3

Die Hard

Active Support

Inclined Towards

Inclined Towards
Short-term damage

Active Support
Medium-term damage

Die Hard
Long-term damage

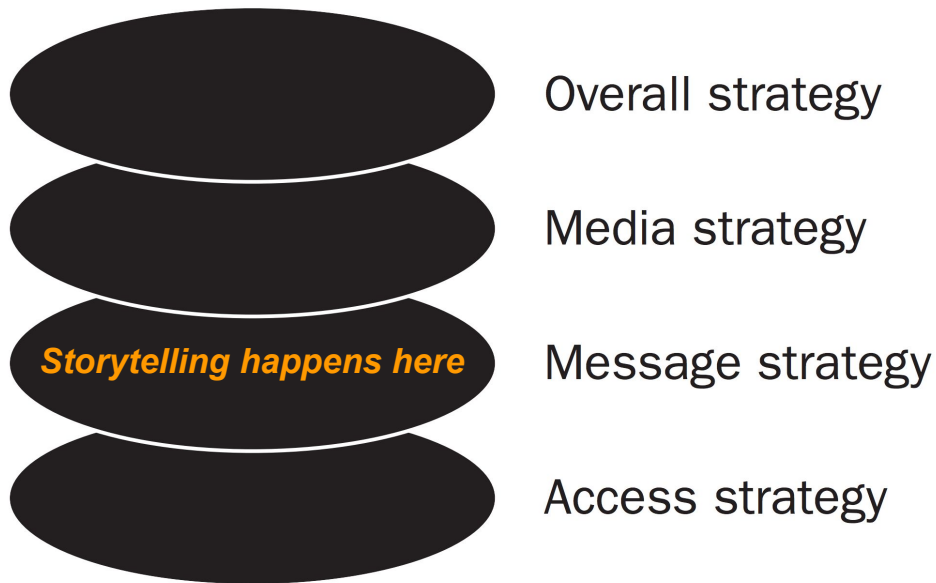
Long-term solutions Medium-term solutions Short-term solutions

Key policy battles

Adapted from
SCOPE LA

m
b s g

layers of strategy



Lesson 2: Make the landscape visible.



Cognitive frames

Mental pathways that help people understand the world.

Just a few clues...

PEACE & JUSTICE



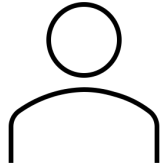
a challenge with storytelling is...

going from...

I beat the odds!

to...

Our leaders must change
the odds and create
conditions where
everyone can be healthy



Default frame?

portrait *(episodic)*



Stories tell us a lot about the individual or incident and not much else.

landscape *(thematic)*



Stories show more of the systems and structures around the person, or connect incidents to trends and themes.

Image from Natalie Nourigat, commissioned by Upstream Public Health, used with permission



What are the portrait elements?


What are the landscape elements?



Photo: Bishop Elementary



Photo: City of Englewood



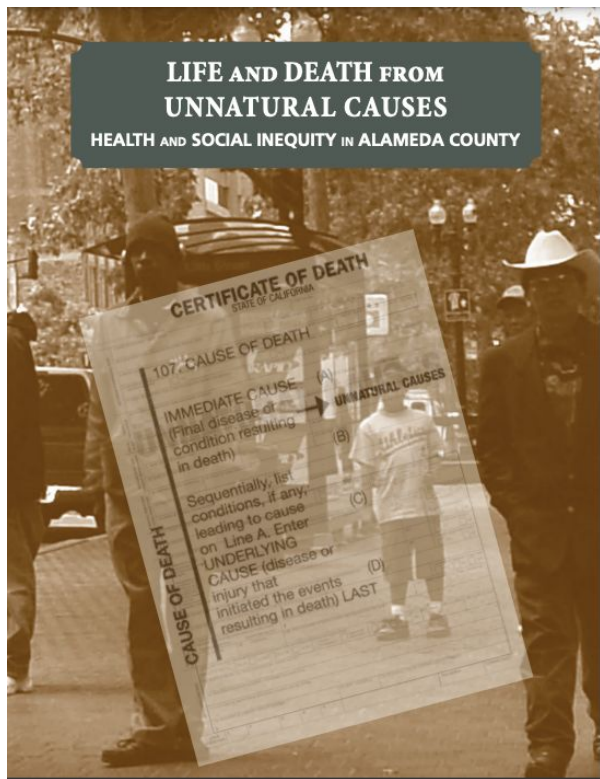
**How do we make the
landscape visible?**

making the landscape visible

What is the context that surrounds the portrait?

- Bring **history** forward
- Use a **few facts/data** points
- Describe a **systemic solution** that will help more than one person
- Name **social factors** or **root causes** that affect this health issue
- Support **authentic voices** in connecting their portrait story to the landscape
- Use **compelling visuals** that include the landscape
- Use **values** in your stories

Bring history forward and show root causes



Education

"American racism persists even without racists. The lingering affects of Jim Crow still haunt our institutions, isolating minorities in ghetto neighborhoods and in decrepit schools that don't send kids to college."


—Anthony P. Carnevale¹

Historical Overview

In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* to end racial segregation in public schools. Despite this promise of equal educational opportunity, the conditions of California's schools have deteriorated since the 1980s with the most serious problems in low-income communities of color.² In 1978, California voters passed Proposition 13 which capped property tax and eliminated it as the main and stable source of education funding. This made it harder for school districts to get the funding they needed to maintain their schools. People who live in wealthier districts have been able to use political power to find alternative funding sources for schools, while the lower income districts have been "left behind".² California spends about \$7,000 per student which is much less money per student than spent by other states. It now ranks

Alameda County Public Health Department's report on social and health inequities





"Lifelong experiences of racial discrimination and the policies that created inequitable neighborhoods and socioeconomic conditions are causing the toxic stress that impacts birth and infant health"

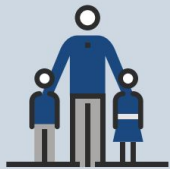
-Dr. Curtis Chan, Deputy Health Officer, San Mateo County

<https://www.sacbee.com/news/nation-world/national/article245745675.html>

Name root causes

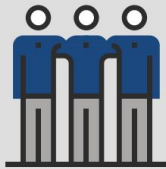
Name how things came to be, show the landscape





Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Physical abuse or neglect
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse or neglect
- Parent or caregiver treated violently
- Substance misuse within household
- Household member who has mental illness
- Parental separation or divorce
- Incarceration of household member



Adverse Community Experiences

- Concentrated poverty and economic instability
- Housing displacement and homelessness
- Deteriorated community conditions caused by underinvestment and the flight of businesses out of communities
- Failing school systems
- Inequitable access to parks and green spaces
- Residential segregation/ segregation from opportunity
- Racism and anti-immigrant bias
- Disproportionate exposures to toxics and pollution
- Poor transportation and food systems

Name social factors: Include community context that shapes individuals' lives

<https://preventioninstitute.org/publications/beyond-screening-achieving-californias-bold-goal-reducing-exposure-childhood-trauma>

The woman pouring your \$18 beer at the Super Bowl makes \$14.25 an hour with no health insurance

By Matthias Gafni

Feb 11, 2024

Gift Article



Use a few facts to show how this impacts more than one person

“I work three jobs and I still qualify for Medicaid,”
“That should tell you something.”

Walker’s plight is not unique. About 2,300 workers will be serving hot dogs, mixing cocktails and scrubbing toilets on Sunday, from stadium janitors to ushers to cashiers hired by companies contracted to manage the new stadium as well as a couple dozen independent restaurants.

Some make as little as \$13 an hour for part-time, seasonal jobs that leave many needing other employment to support themselves. Minimum wage in Nevada is \$10.25 an hour until July, when it bumps up to \$12.

Support authentic voices in connecting their story to the landscape

“What I don’t understand is, if he (Newsom) already came and became aware of the issue, signed the bill, and allocated the funds... where is the action?” Torres-Romo said. “We are fighting against the clock here.”

People have asked why she doesn't just move.

"That's not the solution," she said. "If I leave, another family will just come here and have the same issue."

<https://www.fresnobee.com/fresnoland/article244917932.html>

The Fresno Bee

FRESNOLAND

Drinking water is contaminated in rural California. Why is it taking so long to fix?



After meeting with the governor, woman's water well is still contaminated

Jovita Torres-Romo met with Governor Gavin Newsom who later signed the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund signed by Newsom to provide \$130 million a year to for communities like Tombstone. But Torres-Romo's water is still contaminated. BY CRAIG KOHLRUSS

bmg



FARM · ARTICLE

The Community Organizing Effort That Helped Save an Urban Farm in New Orleans

A park had plans on building a road through a beloved urban farm and youth program in New Orleans. But the farm's supporters weren't having it.

#Access #Climate #Policy

by [Drew Costley, Verite News](#) · November 18, 2024



**Use compelling visuals
that show the landscape**

Articulate your values

common-
sense

pride of
place

community

liberty

family

unity

fairness

democracy

interconnection

can-do spirit

An Analysis of Health Equity in the San Joaquin Valley Region

A Report from the San Joaquin Valley Public Health Consortium

February, 2022



Lead with values

“The diversity, commitment, ingenuity, and resiliency of the region’s people have carried them through decades of hardship and adversity and make the Valley a unique and valuable place to live for many.”

A close-up, low-angle shot of a microphone, likely a Shure SM58, against a dark, textured background. The microphone is positioned diagonally, with its head pointing towards the bottom left. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the mesh grille and the metallic body of the microphone.

What can we do?

- **Embed equity into our overall strategies.**

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What can we do?

- **Embed equity into our overall strategies.**
- **Reframe to make the landscape visible.**



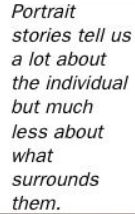
What can we do?

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- **Articulate our values.**



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- **Embed equity into our overall strategies.**
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- **Articulate our values.**



Portrait stories tell us a lot about the individual but much less about what surrounds them.

My portrait story

Your personal connection to this issue matters. What is your portrait story? Keep it brief—this is only part of the story. You can use bullet points.



Landscape stories show more of the environment around the person, including the systems and structures that surround them.

My landscape story

Fill in a few details of your landscape story. Be sure to name a solution and your values.

What is an issue I care about? For example housing, immigration, gun violence prevention, child welfare, criminal justice system.

•

What is my role? A few examples are: mother, grandfather, community worker, advocate, tenant, immigrant, healthcare worker, or a person harmed by this policy.

•

How has this issue harmed me?

•

Why do I care about this issue?

•

What is the problem? From your point of view, what caused this problem. You can use examples from your portrait story, but include some of the landscape too (how this affects many people, not just you; history; policies, etc.)

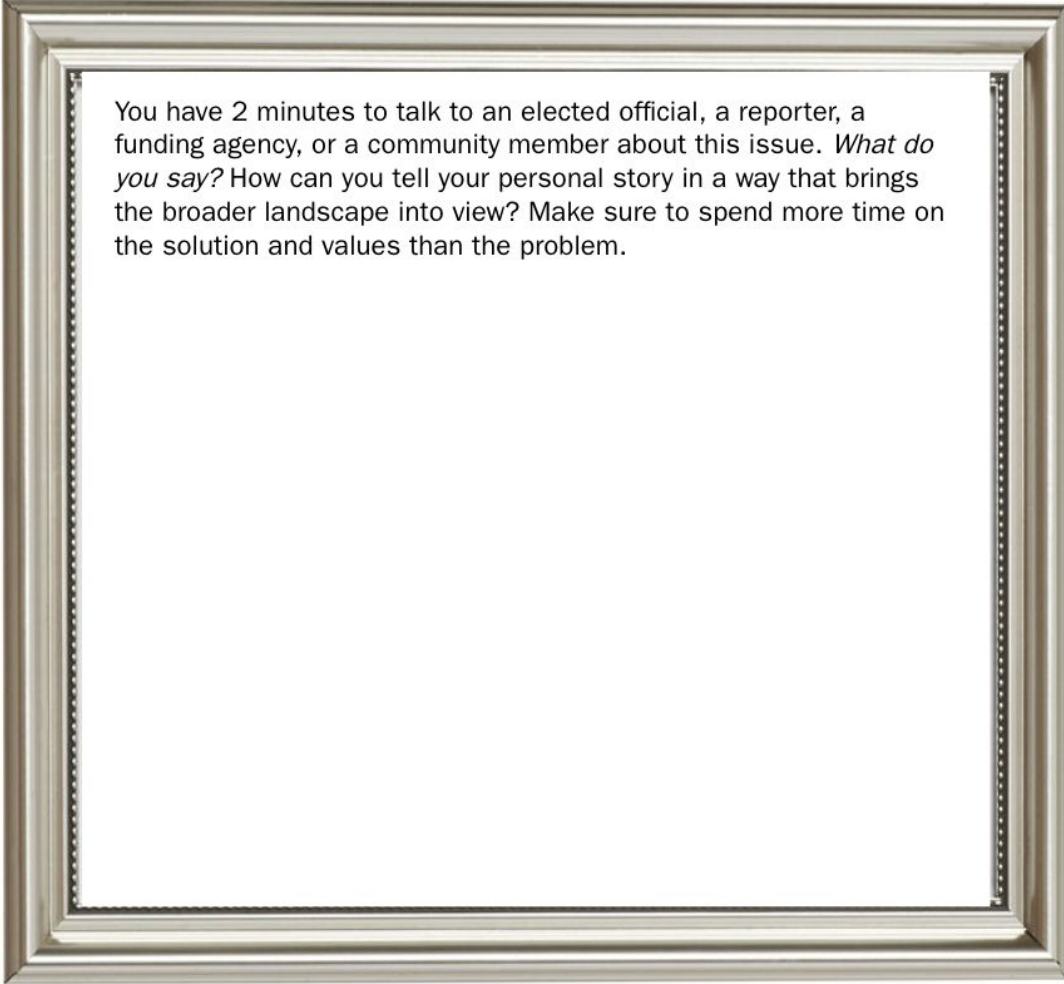
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Why does it matter? How do your values connect to values others hold, like interconnection, community, unity, prevention, or justice?

•

What is the solution? What could solve this problem and who has the power to make that happen at a systemic level?

•



You have 2 minutes to talk to an elected official, a reporter, a funding agency, or a community member about this issue. *What do you say?* How can you tell your personal story in a way that brings the broader landscape into view? Make sure to spend more time on the solution and values than the problem.

Putting it together!

A helpful phrase to get to the solution is: *And that's why we need...*

Las Historias de Retratos nos cuentan mucho sobre el individuo pero mucho menos sobre lo que les rodea.

Mi Historia de Retrato

Instrucciones: Su conexión personal a este tema es importante. ¿Qué es su historia de retrato? Procure ser breve—esto es solo parte de la historia. Puede usar puntos de enumeración.

¿Cuál tema es importante para mí? (Por ejemplo: vivienda, inmigración, temas de educación, control de armas, reforma de la justicia penal)

-

¿Cuál es mi papel? Unos ejemplos son: madre, abuela, tía, hermana, hija, trabajadora de la comunidad, defensora, inquilina, inmigrante, o una persona afectada negativamente por esta política.

-

¿Cómo me ha impactado este tema?

-

¿Por qué es importante para mí este tema?

-

Las historias de paisajes demuestran más sobre el medioambiente que rodea a la persona, incluso sistemas y estructuras a su alrededor.

Mi Historia de Paisaje

Instrucciones: Empiece a llenar los detalles de su historia de paisaje. Use las preguntas para asegurar incluir una solución y sus valores.

¿Cuál es el problema? Su respuesta debería incluir su perspectiva sobre lo que no ha funcionado—puede usar ejemplos de su historia de retrato, pero piense cómo puede incrustar su historia personal dentro del marco más amplio.

-

¿Por qué es importante? Su respuesta debe incluir sus valores fundamentales.

-

¿Qué es la solución? Su respuesta debe incluir quién debe tomar acción de políticas y para cuando.

-

Instrucciones: Tendrá 2 minutos para hablar sobre el tema con el funcionario electo, reportero/a, la agencia de financiación, o un miembro comunitario. *¿Qué dirá? ¿Cómo puede contar su historia personal en una manera que permita el paisaje más amplio a la vista? Asegure darle más tiempo a la solución y a los valores en lugar del problema.*

!Preparativos!

Consejo

- Una frase conveniente para llegar a la solución es: *Y es por eso que necesitamos...*

thank you



stay connected!

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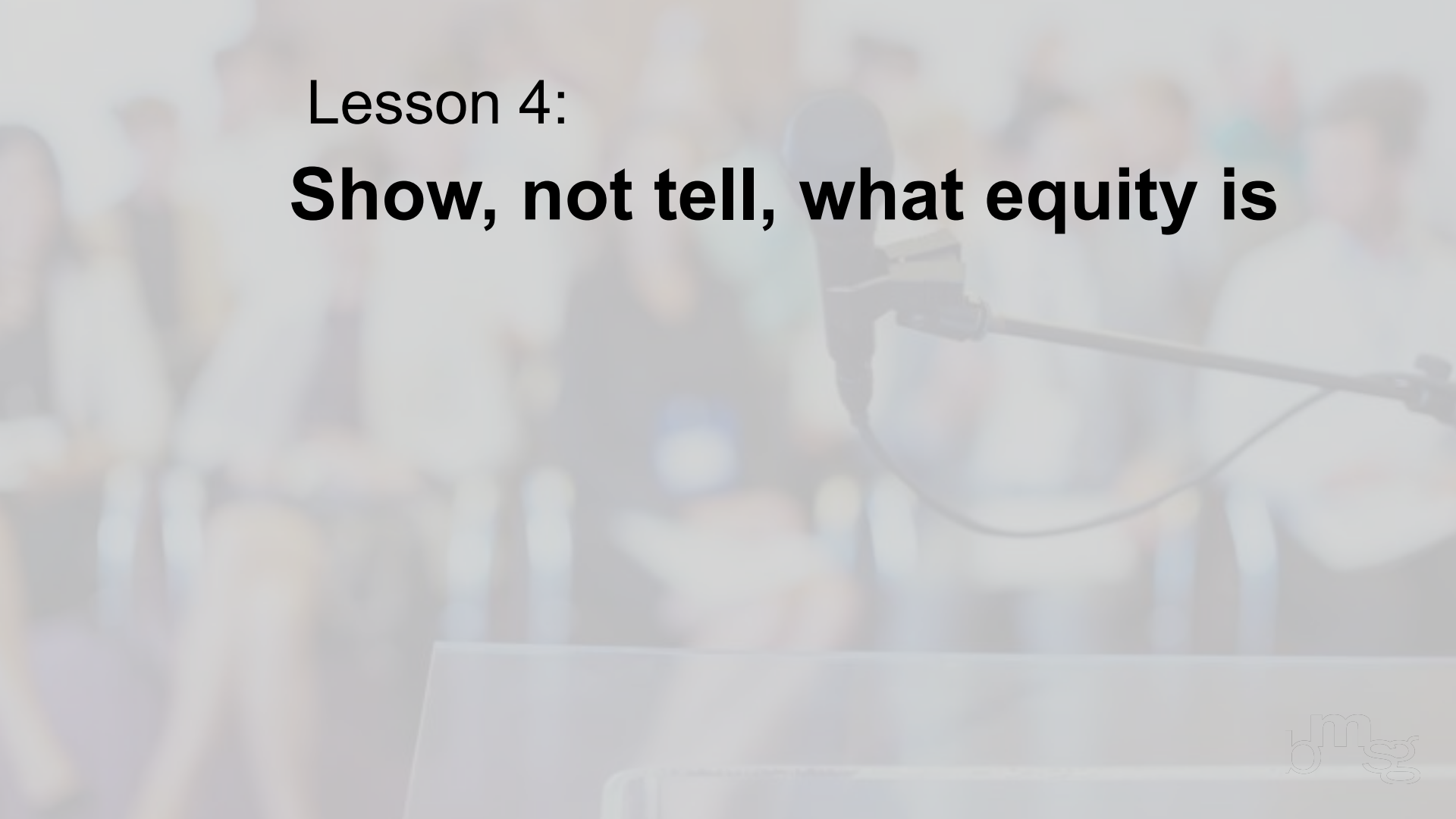


Twitter: @BMSG



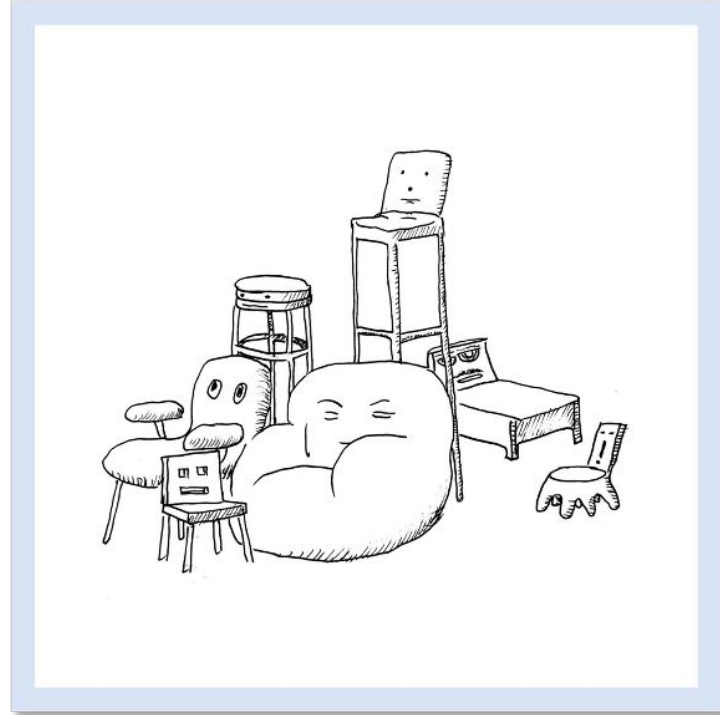
Facebook: Berkeley Media Studies Group





Lesson 4:

Show, not tell, what equity is



Show not tell



for example

Avoid labels and jargon. Instead of saying “*health equity*”

try saying:

“We want our county to be a healthy, safe, and vibrant place for everyone, yet some of us face barriers to this.”

for example


Avoid labels and jargon. Instead of saying “*health equity*”

try saying:

“We want our county to be a healthy, safe, and vibrant place for everyone, yet some of us face barriers to this.”

Or better yet, say:

“We want our county to be a healthy, safe, and vibrant place for everyone. This means that our residents have access to good jobs with dignity, quality schools and housing, reliable ways to get from place to place, and clear air to breathe.”



“Our country manufactures social vulnerability through policy violence. Policy violence is the intentional absence of protective policy in the face of abject need. Policy violence leaves large segments of our society experiencing constant daily stress as they try to navigate a healthy life without health insurance, decent housing, affordable child care, paid sick leave, or quality education.”

—Dr. Tony Iton

Vice President of The California Endowment

