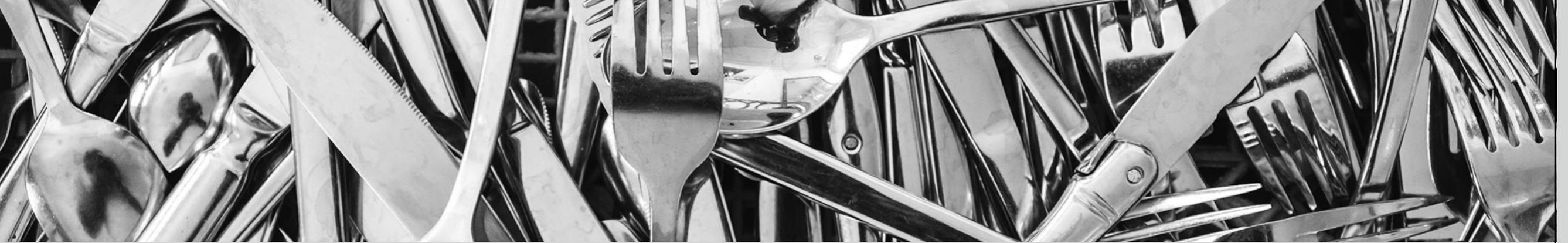


# SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES ON HUNGER

A PLAYBOOK CREATED BY A PLACE AT THE TABLE



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without movement-building agency Purpose and the support of the Robert Wood Johnson, Annenberg and Angell Foundations.

Special thanks also to the FrameWorks Institute and especially to Julie Sweetland.

Our gratitude also goes out to anti-hunger leaders in America who work to alleviate the impact of poverty, advocate for systems change and devote themselves to creating a more just and equitable future. In particular, thanks to those leaders who provided guidance and input for this playbook including Minerva Delgado from the Alliance to End Hunger, Jake Claro and Sarah Danly from Vermont Farm to Plate, Marc Jacobson from Hunger Free Colorado, Chris Ford from Bread for the World and Lisa Fernandes from the UNH Sustainability Institute.

02

# SETTING THE TABLE



# SETTING THE TABLE

America's hunger problem is vast, deep and is relentlessly perpetuated by poverty. Organizations on the frontlines fighting the issue have worked for decades to address its root causes, but the problem persists with nearly 40 million Americans struggling with hunger across the country.

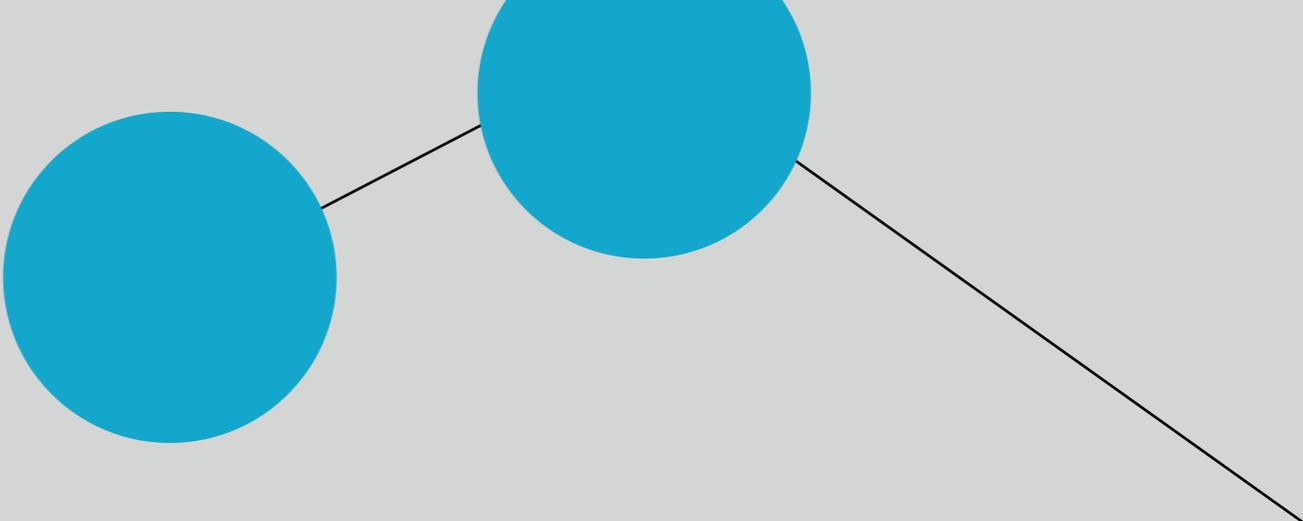
Given that structural racism is a root cause of hunger and communities of color are disproportionately impacted, we believe that it is important for anti-hunger organizations take a lead role in communicating how historical racism impacts poverty in America.

We believe that a narrative shift that destigmatizes hunger and makes space for human dignity, rather than assigning blame to those already suffering, is a core need for the current movement to end hunger, and that solutions focused on impacting systemic change will ultimately shift what hunger looks like across America.

## **FOR DECADES, COMMUNITIES OF COLOR**

**have faced structural barriers, and as a result their white counterparts are more advantaged in employment, income and education. COVID-19 has exacerbated these disparities with African-Americans, Latinos and Native Americans experiencing higher death rates, food insecurity and loss of employment. The clear connections between race, wealth and health are unavoidable and unacceptable.**

- National Alliance of Hunger Organizations



# WHO'S AT THE TABLE?

***A Place at the Table*** was founded in 2013 and works to fuel a critical shift in the public's mindset about poverty and hunger in America—to inform the public about the scope of the hunger problem in America, its deep impact on our society and how systemic solutions like smart policies can help end it. We exist to help people who care about the issue use the tools of democracy to become advocates for others. All of us deserve access to good food and a healthy life.

***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. FrameWorks designs, conducts, and publishes multi-method, multi-disciplinary framing research to prepare experts and advocates to expand their constituencies, to build public will, and to further public understanding.

# YOU

are a leader for social change. While the two aforementioned organizations collaborated on this research, you play a critical role in communicating about the issue of hunger. How you consider who to partner with, what you say to legislative allies, and how you ask for support from the public, all play a role in the way that public discourse is set, how minds are shifted, and the social change that manifests as a result. You can utilize the information in this playbook to help create a broader understanding of hunger that emphasizes its collective and systemic nature and open hearts and minds to real approaches that will end hunger.





1

IN



8

# THE RESEARCH IN CONTEXT

Today, **1 in 8 Americans\*** do not have access to enough nutritious food because of economic and geographic reasons (FrameWorks Institute, 2018). The release of A Place At The Table's namesake documentary in 2012 gave anti-hunger organizations a new tool to communicate what advocates and experts had long identified—that too many Americans **can't get enough nutritious food**, and that **systemic factors cause this problem**. Hunger happens across a much more diverse intersection of America than existing and current narratives are representing and to make systemic change we must shift how we talk about hunger and the people who experience it.

\*This research was conducted pre-Coronavirus pandemic and does not incorporate the expanded need created by the COVID-19 crisis.



The FrameWorks Institute research builds upon the work of A Place At The Table and sets out to give guidance for organizational leaders around how to communicate about hunger in the most effective ways toward social impact—illuminating research-vetted messaging frames that anti-hunger organizations can adapt to be catalysts for change in their communities and across the nation.

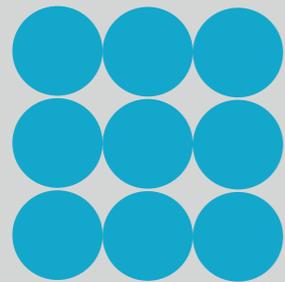
Upon completion of the FrameWorks messaging brief, A Place At The Table presented the research to anti-hunger and adjacent organizations to inform how best to make the findings from the brief accessible and actionable for organizations.

“To arrive at a set of framing tools and tactics that advocates can use with confidence, FrameWorks designed a series of quantitative experiments that tested the effects of different frame elements on communicating expert perspectives on hunger. The frame elements included different ways of using values, explanatory metaphors, and narratives.

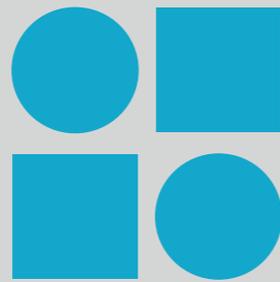
To determine the effects of these frames, researchers first created short messages that incorporated one or more frame elements. From a large, nationally representative sample of US residents, a survey experiment randomly assigned participants to different messages and then asked them to complete a survey probing their knowledge, attitudes, and policy preferences about issues around hunger.” (FrameWorks Institute, 2018)

# FRAMEWORKS METHODOLOGY

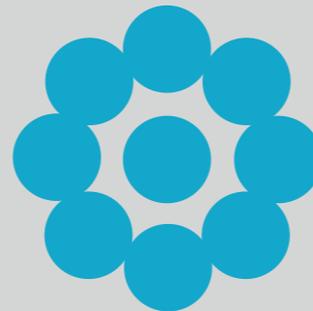
(FrameWorks Institute, 2018)



**SAMPLE**



**RANDOM  
ASSIGNMENT**



**TREATMENT  
GROUPS**



**OUTCOME  
MEASURES**



**ANALYSIS**

1. Over 5000 nationally representative participants took part in this research.

2. Participants were randomly assigned to different message groups.

3. There were four groups total, 1 control group (given no message) and 3 groups each with a different message.

4. Upon being given the message, participants were asked to complete a survey probing their knowledge, attitudes, and policy preferences about issues around hunger.

5. Quantitative analysis was performed to surface differences between those given the various messages and the control group (controlling for demographic variability).



# WHY NOW?

The United States is presently grappling with many issues of social consequence. While hunger has long been a problem experienced by too many Americans, the Novel Coronavirus Pandemic of 2020 exposed the fragility and gaps in systems and safety nets designed to support Americans in times of need. In light of the pandemic, there is a very present focus on hunger as an issue and Americans are moving quickly to give and support frontline efforts to alleviate hunger.

The attention that nationwide Black Lives Matter protests have given to the historic and systemic racism imbedded in our society has also been an important step toward deeper awareness of the connections between racism and generational poverty.

Now more than ever, how anti-hunger and adjacent organizations talk about hunger is critical and the implications could include changes that lift many people out of hunger and poverty.

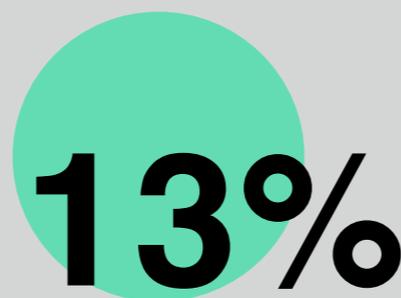
# HOW HAS CORONAVIRUS SHIFTED THE NARRATIVE?

(Hunger Free America, 2020)



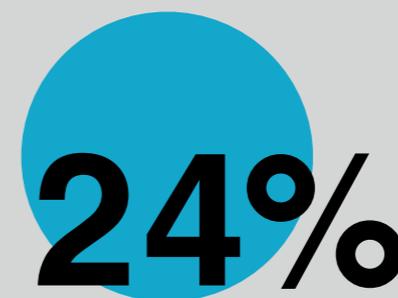
**12X**

as many people want to boost SNAP as those who want to cut it. Even among Republicans and residents of red states, support for increasing SNAP funding was strong.



**13%**

of parents nationwide are cutting the size of meals or skipping meals for their children because they did not have enough money for food in the last month.



**24%**

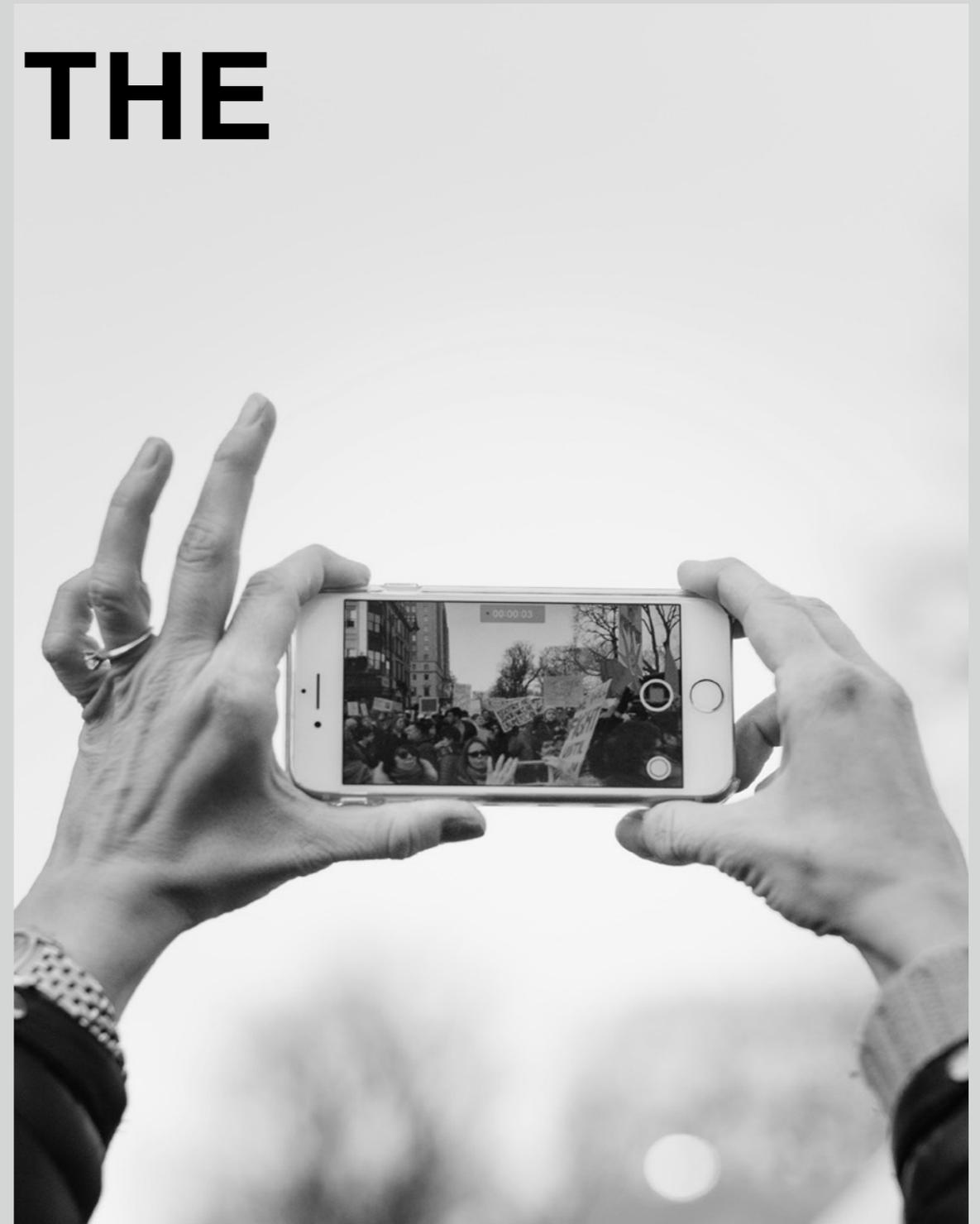
of adults skipped meals or cut portions because they lacked enough money for food. That's about two and a half times the adult hunger rate of 2018.

**03**

**ABOUT THIS  
PLAYBOOK**

# WE MUST SHIFT THE NARRATIVE

Throughout history, successful movements have been those that effectively communicate about the problem to meet people where they are, expanding and shifting the public's understanding of the issue such that policy change becomes increasingly more likely. We can see this outcome when we examine the struggles of the US Civil Rights Movement, to the once emerging War on Poverty led by Dr. King. We see this shift it in contemporary movements too, like marriage equality and the anti-tobacco movement.



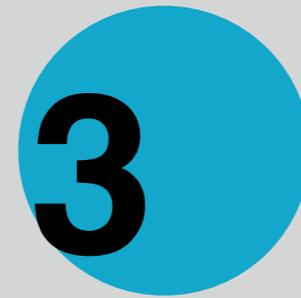
# THIS PLAYBOOK WILL EQUIP ORGANIZATIONS TO:



Understand the existing harmful frames that drive current thinking on hunger.



Utilize research-vetted frames and language to increase support around hunger.



Identify and promote ways for your organization to shift current messaging and language that might perpetuate harmful frames.



# WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

Throughout this playbook, you will find information about what impedes the public's understanding of hunger as an issue, a breakdown of the frames we've identified that we think work, and some points for where you might consider to start implementing these frames. Throughout this playbook you will find examples of messaging done well. You may find questions that ask you to reflect on a concept or frame. This playbook can be read individually or used in collaborative group presentations or activities. Tips are scattered throughout that drive key pieces of information, and at the end of the playbook you will find a summary of how to get started, as well as additional resources.

**04**

**ON  
HUNGER**

# HUNGER IS SYSTEMIC, INTERSECTIONAL AND SOLVABLE

Hunger is a systemic issue rooted in deep political and social inequities. The experience of hunger for individuals and families creates economic barriers impacting access to housing or critical infrastructure like power and gas. Hunger is also an important determinant for outcomes in education, as well as mental and physical health. Understanding and addressing the intersectionality of the issue as it relates to other social issues is a key component of anti-hunger work today. **The far reaching impact of hunger is best understood across issue spaces when its intersectional nature is elevated and metaphors that create a clear understanding of hunger are used.** By shifting how we talk about hunger, from a personal issue solved by charity to a broad social issue that can only be tackled through holistic intervention, we can move toward a hunger free America.



05

# WHAT IMPEDES UNDERSTANDING?

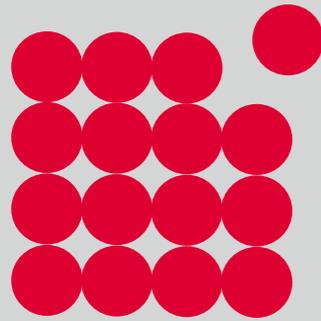
# MANY AMERICANS STILL VIEW HUNGER AS A PERSONAL PROBLEM

Research and experts agree that numerous systemic obstacles exist to undermine access to healthy food across the United States, and yet many Americans still view hunger as a personal problem. While there are many barriers that exist—especially geographic and economic barriers—that contribute to how hunger manifests, many Americans still try to make sense of this issue, and the people who experience hunger, through beliefs framed around personal blame and laziness (Hunger Free America, 2020).

Being that hunger is a systemic issue, it must be tackled holistically. Our challenge isn't to highlight brokenness but to inspire solutions. Any messaging around hunger should center the dignity of the human experience as a core value.



# THESE UNHELPFUL BELIEFS ARE DRIVEN BY THE FOLLOWING CULTURAL MODELS:



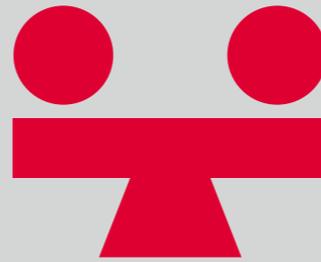
**INDIVIDUALISM**

Life outcomes are a result of individual choices.



**MENTALISM**

'Bad' personal choices are the result of a lack of discipline.



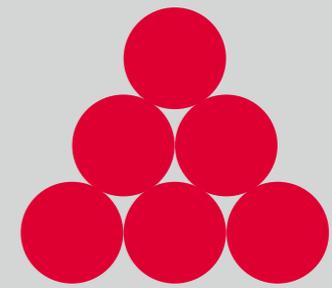
**THE BALANCED  
BUDGET**

People are hungry because they do not manage their money well.



**CONFUSING  
TERMINOLOGY**

Terms like "food insecurity" can confuse people when talking about hunger.



**THE CHARITY  
MINDSET**

Hunger is a personal issue, and solvable by personal charity (give money, give food).

06

# COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY ABOUT HUNGER

# THE MESSAGING MUST-HAVES

(Hunger Free America, 2020)



Define and say the word "**hunger**" in its U.S. context.



Use the **Food Ecosystem** metaphor to talk about other socioeconomic determinants of hunger.



Use the metaphor of a **Power Grid** to emphasize geographic drivers of hunger.



Combat the negative stereotypes of people who experience hunger by **broadening the public's understanding of who is hungry.**



# 1. ALWAYS DEFINE AND SAY HUNGER

FrameWorks found that people are not familiar with the term *food insecurity* and often confuse its meaning. For example, survey participants often interpreted this term as describing guilt over food choices, trouble sticking to a diet, or eating disorders. That is, participants defaulted to a colloquial definition of insecurity. The term *hunger* does have its limitations, but researchers found that people do see *hunger* as an important policy priority—and one that ranks higher than *food insecurity*. Research suggests that the term *hunger* is effective, although, as discussed below, it must be explained to build understanding. It's incredibly important to talk about the **quality** and **quantity** of food when talking about hunger (Hunger Free America, 2020).

## YOU COULD SAY:

- ◆ 1 in 8 Americans are food insecure
- ◆ Here's a list of food assistance programs
- ◆ Some geographies are food deserts
- ◆ Food is unaffordable
- ◆ People who are experiencing hunger are not lazy—they're good people

## BUT YOU SHOULD SAY:

- ◆ 1 in 8 Americans don't get enough healthy food
- ◆ Good programs are essential, but insufficient in ending hunger
- ◆ Food is unequally distributed
- ◆ America's food system is out of balance
- ◆ All types of people experience hunger when food systems are out of balance

## GETTING THERE. QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- ◆ How are you currently communicating about hunger and where might there be room to make a change? Reflect on the “messaging must haves”.
- ◆ What audiences of people, that you and your organization interact with, might make the most sense to begin reinforcing these messages with?



## 2. USE THE ECOSYSTEM METAPHOR WHEN IT WORKS

An ecosystem is made up of many moving parts that all impact one another. Living things in an ecosystem depend on one another to keep the balance. **Comparing hunger to an ecosystem helps people recognize how other social factors contribute to hunger, like, structural inequity, low wages and high costs of living.** These factors can impact which neighborhoods get quality food and how affordable it might be.

Our research found that, **people who see hunger through the Ecosystem Metaphor can better understand the intersectionality of hunger and were less likely to describe hunger as a result of individuals' choices and more likely to describe it as a result of a lack of affordable food** (Hunger Free America, 2020).

The Ecosystem Metaphor can be especially helpful when communicating for support around the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program [SNAP].

The example below expresses how the Ecosystem Metaphor can be applied when talking about the *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP]* Messaging shifts are highlighted in bold.

## YOU COULD:

*use language that says SNAP is a great program but perpetuates current cultural models:*

“The Farm Bill is the **centerpiece federal legislation** for food and farming, and it impacts access to nutritious food for the millions of American families struggling with hunger. One of the priority programs to protect is SNAP - the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as food stamps). **SNAP is a cornerstone federal program** to help hardworking families during difficult times. Serving more than 43 million Americans, SNAP is the largest anti-hunger program in the United States.”

## BUT YOU SHOULD:

*compare the need for SNAP to imbalances in the food ecosystem—a systemic problem, not one of personal choices:*

“The Farm Bill is the major piece of legislation that shapes our food ecosystem. It offers a chance to **restore balance to parts of the system** that have been disrupted - like the disconnect between rising food costs and stagnant wages. Government programs that subsidize food purchases, like SNAP, have been successful in **restoring access to healthy food**, but they need to be expanded. A small increase in SNAP benefits could make a big difference. Adding just \$19 a month to **a family’s benefit would seed a shift from less nutritious foods, like bread or potatoes, to healthier items that cost just a bit more, like tomatoes or carrots.**”

## GETTING THERE. QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- ◆ How might you communicate this metaphor in your own words?
- ◆ Name some specific elements of the ecosystem that you see reflected in your community or work.
- ◆ Who do you interact with in the ecosystem that you might be able to influence?

---

 **Pro Tip:** Avoid explaining economic causes of hunger without a metaphor. Simply connecting hunger to the broader economy is not a sufficient communication tactic.



### 3. USE THE POWER GRID METAPHOR WHEN IT WORKS

A Power Grid is an interconnected system that gets power from the plants that produce it to the people who need it. **Comparing the food system to a power grid helps people understand the geographic barriers to accessing affordable, healthy food facing Americans.** People living in rural areas often travel long distances to reach quality grocery stores. And people who live in urban areas often lack adequate transportation to reach quality grocery stores. **This comparison helps people see that food isn't distributed equally to all parts of the country and that people who live in areas with "patchy" food coverage face difficulty getting healthy food** (Hunger Free America, 2020).

The example below expresses how the Power Grid Metaphor can be applied when talking about *food deserts*. Messaging shifts are highlighted in bold.

## YOU COULD:

*define food desert instead of hunger, and use terminology that isolates marginalized communities:*

“The term **food desert** refers to geographic areas where people have limited access to healthy food, a problem that affects millions of Americans every year. These areas tend to have concentrations of **low-income and minority residents**, invoking socioeconomic and racial divides. Washington, DC has **6.5 square miles of food deserts** overall—about 11 percent of the city’s total area. Areas including **Historic Anacostia, Barry Farms, Mayfair, and Ivy City contain the majority of food deserts found in the city.**”

## BUT YOU SHOULD:

*compare the hunger experience to a power grid to help people understand the geographic causes of hunger and to suppress patterns of thinking that blame individuals:*

“Just as our city’s power grid delivers electricity to every neighborhood, our food systems should connect every community to the healthy food it needs. **Right now, there are areas where this grid doesn’t reach - locations where it’s difficult to get to a grocery store that sells fresh produce.** In fact, about **11% of DC’s total area has patchy access to the food grid.** Most residents in these disconnected neighborhoods are lower income and people of color. We should expand and strengthen the network that supplies the most basic source of energy: good food.”

## GETTING THERE. QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- ◆ How might you communicate this metaphor in your own words?
- ◆ Name some specific elements of the power grid that you see reflected in your community.
- ◆ Where is your work or organization situated in the power grid metaphor?



## **4. ELEVATE DIVERSE AND REFRAMED STORIES THAT DON'T PERPETUATE STEREOTYPES**

It's important to share diverse stories of people who experience hunger to broaden understanding of what those true lived experiences might look like and combat negative stereotypes that usually target the most marginalized individuals and communities.

The example below expresses how you can reframe your language to center equity and move away from stereotypes when talking about people who are hungry. Messaging shifts are highlighted in bold.

## YOU COULD SAY:

Right now in America, over 41 million people in the US—1 in 8—experience hunger, which means they aren't able to get enough food or they aren't able to get healthy food. **Anita is one of those people. She is homeless and depends on the generosity of strangers, food banks, and government assistance to get by.** Each month she receives a small amount of money towards groceries from SNAP. But **because food banks can't always help her** and SNAP benefits are low, she cannot afford enough healthy food.

## BUT YOU SHOULD SAY:

Right now in America, over 41 million people in the US—1 in 8—experience hunger, which means they aren't able to get enough food or they aren't able to get healthy food. **Anita is one of those people. She is a parent of two children and works a minimum wage job.** Each month she receives a small amount of money towards groceries for her family from SNAP. But **because her job does not pay well** and SNAP benefits are low, her family frequently cannot afford enough healthy food.

## GETTING THERE. QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- ◆ How would you communicate the key differences between the **You Could..., But You Should** narratives?
- ◆ What personal stories about hunger have subverted your own understanding of who is impacted?
- ◆ Is there enough diversity in the leadership ranks of your organization to help ensure input from a variety of personal experiences?
- ◆ Name two things your organization can do today to shift how you tell stories about people experiencing hunger.

07

# WHERE TO START

# SOME THINGS TO REMEMBER

There are plenty of places to start thinking about how you can use the recommendations in this playbook. The key priorities below neatly recap what we think works and give you and your organization clear starting points for shifting perspectives on hunger (Hunger Free America, 2020).

- ◆ **Emphasize that hunger is systemic, intersectional and solvable.** We can end hunger in America. The challenge is not to convince people that the system is broken but to convince them that it can, and should, be repaired to better support all of us. Repair can only happen by tackling systems, not symptoms.
- ◆ **Say hunger and use the metaphors, when it works.** To generate a systemic and collective understanding of hunger. The metaphors give us a means to describe the nature of hunger so that people begin to understand the intersectionality of the issue and that charity + service will not ultimately end hunger.
- ◆ **Tell different types of experiential stories** to counter stereotypes and help people identify with the experience of hunger.
- ◆ **Center racial equity as a core tenet in communications.** Find opportunities to point out how the racial wealth gap impacts lower wages and thereby hunger, higher unemployment, high housing costs and lack of savings.

# EXAMPLES IN ACTION

Here are some examples from Hunger Free Colorado, an organization working on equitable access to food across Colorado, and their campaign *Hunger Through My Lens*, to shift how people, both practitioners in the space and the general public, perceive and talk about hunger.



## 1. Reversed Disparity

“I took the photo of the beautiful bananas in a large, chain supermarket in a nice neighborhood. The other bananas, which were over-ripe and more expensive, were in a little corner bodega in a low-income neighborhood. It struck me that people living in poverty have no chance of eating nutritionally with that kind of disparity.”

### Why This Works

The image centers on hunger, displaying both the quality and quantity components of the definition, making it easy to apply both metaphors.

### What Could Change

The caption could more explicitly connect to the systemic barriers by fleshing out the connections to either the ecosystem or the power grid metaphor.

## 2. AIDS [HIV+]. Food is Medicine Too

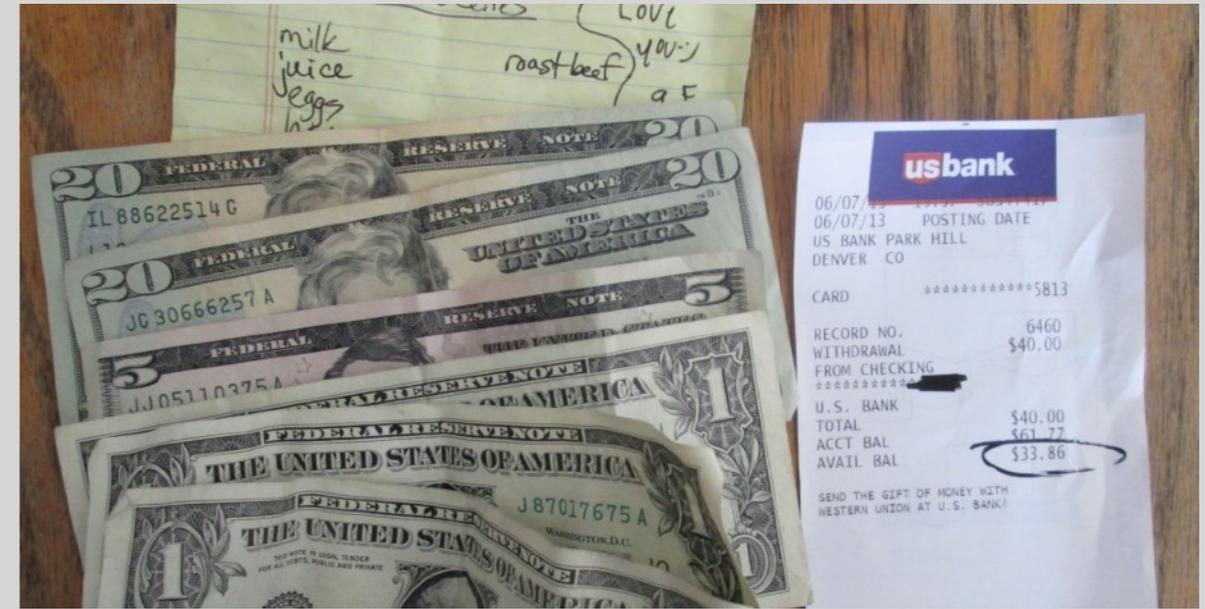
“I have AIDS [HIV+]. And I’ve discovered that my medicine doesn’t work if I’m not eating right. The driver’s license photo on the left was taken in September 2007 when I wasn’t eating well. The photo on the right was taken in August of last year. Look how much better I look when I’m eating well! Food feeds not just the body but the soul.”

### Why This Works

This image and caption clearly denotes the intersectionality of hunger and how hunger connects to and is a symptom of systemic barriers to access. This image also elevates a personal lived experience that broadens the understanding of who experiences hunger.

### What Could Change

This framing still perpetuates that hunger is solvable by personal action, and could be improved by linking the structural or societal barriers that created the hunger circumstance.



**3. The Land Is Plentiful, So Why Isn't Access?**

"I took this photo of a community garden in Denver. This small plot of land helps provide food for people who don't have enough money to buy fresh produce. There is so much land available in this country for gardens like this. Why don't more people have access to it?"

**Why This Works**

This caption clearly transitions the blame of hunger from the personal, to society, and simultaneously infers that the solution is found in the collective.

**What Could Change**

The caption could be improved by answering the question "Why don't more people have access to it?" and showcasing a solution.

**4. The stress of \$50 a week — \$2.40 per person, per day for one mom, two kids.**

"After I lost my job, grocery shopping became extremely stressful. Even just the act of making the shopping list caused stress, knowing I wouldn't be able to afford many of the items on the list. One morning, I saw that my nephew had written 'I love you' on my grocery list, and just that small notation made me feel so much better."

**Why This Works**

The caption lifts a lived experience and the emphasis on stress and feeling, humanizes the person dealing with hunger.

**What Could Change**

We think this photo does a great job communicating the systemic nature of hunger.

**08**

# **TOOLS + RESOURCES**



# TOOLS + RESOURCES

Here are some organizations that we think are doing a great job talking about hunger.

- ◆ [Neighbors Together](#)
- ◆ [Results](#)
- ◆ [Spotlight on Poverty & Opportunity](#)
- ◆ [Action for Opportunity](#)
- ◆ [Alliance to End Hunger](#)
- ◆ [Bread for the World](#)
- ◆ [Hunger Free Colorado](#)
- ◆ [Vermont Farm to Plate](#)

## Resources from our partners

- ◆ Bread for the World  
[Applying a Racial Equity Lens to End Hunger](#)
- ◆ Food Solutions New England  
[21 Day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge](#)
- ◆ The Alliance to End Hunger  
[Advocacy Playbook](#)
- ◆ [Hunger Free America Polling](#)

# CONTACT US

[apattusa.org](http://apattusa.org)

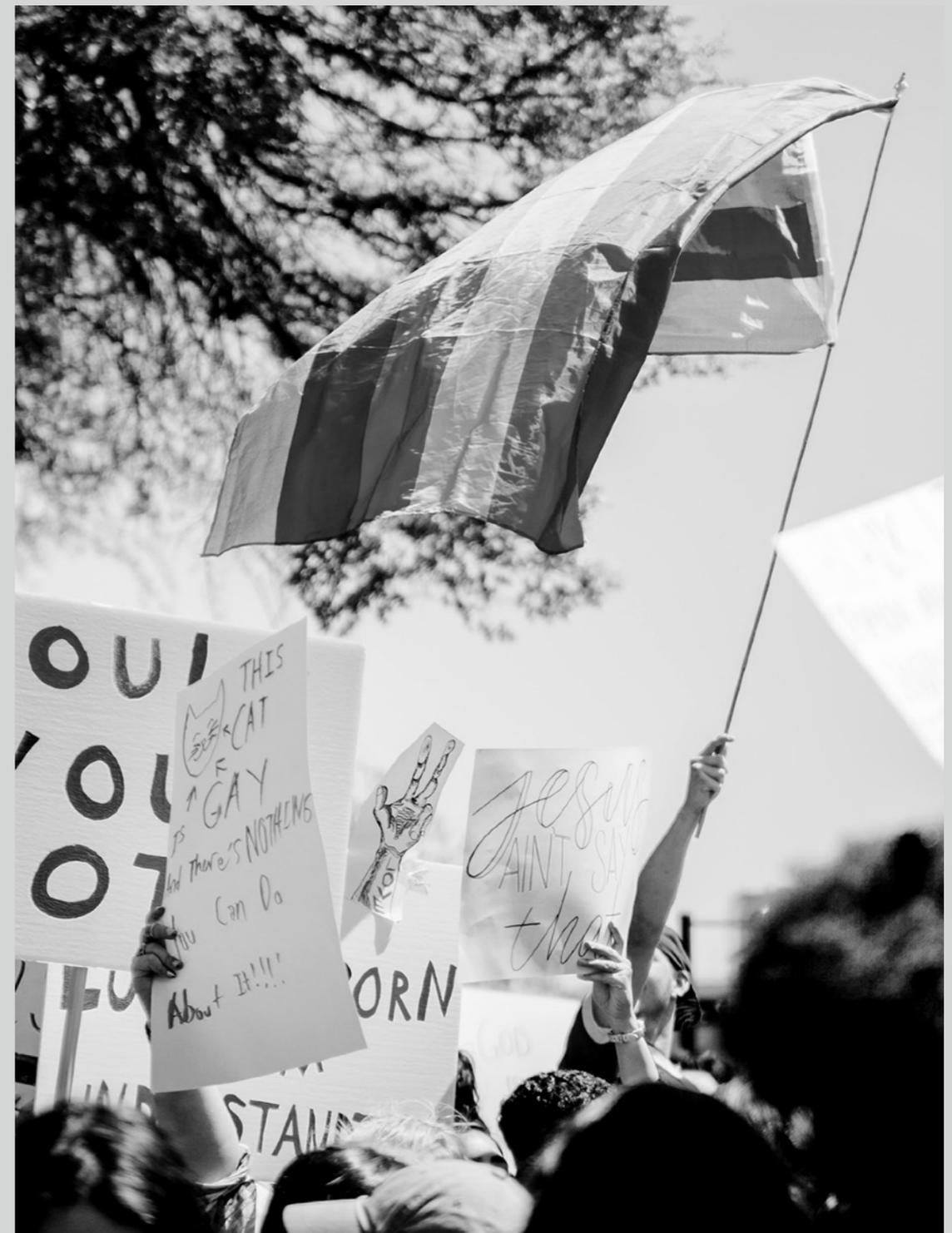
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