Reframing Affordable Housing

Why some message about housing backfire when others do not

Invited by
Home for All
San Mateo County

March 22, 2018

Moira O’Neil, PhD, Director
Research Interpretation and Application Unit
What is a Frame?

Frames are sets of choices about how information is presented:

What to emphasize, how to explain it, and what to leave unsaid.
Backfires reflect patterns in thinking

- Mobility, Personal Responsibility, and Self-Makingness
- Separate Fates and Zero-Sum Thinking
- Thin Understanding of Cause and Effect
- Crisis and Fatalism
- NIMBY and Segregation is Natural
- Facts Don’t Fit the (Pre-existing) Frame
Cultural Models: 
The Basis of Strategic Communications

Multiple models available

Some are more productive than others

Choose the cues that activate productive models
“Housing” = Assisted Housing

Government
- Responsible for Regulating Rentals
- Inefficient and Corrupts

Consumerism
- Rising Costs
- Just the Basics
- Segregation is Natural

Housing as Threat
- Healthy Housing = Do No Harm
-Visible Contaminants
- Stress Affects Health

Fatalism

Individualism
- Mentalism
- Individual Responsibility
- The Good Old Days
- Evil Slumlord

Context
- Protection from Outside World
- What Surrounds Us Shapes Us
- Open Children

What's in the swamp of...

Housing
Frames to avoid

- **Consumerism** — the “you get what you pay for” frame is naturalized
- **Fatalism & Crisis** — allows people to think problems cannot be solved
- **Individualism** — limits the types of solutions that are available