Using Asset-Based Language & Centering Stakeholders
Prepared for NOPREN

May 9, 2022

Agenda

+ **Survey Says**

+ **Grounding Definitions**

+ **Asset-Based Best Practices**

+ **Reframing**

+ **Reflections**

Poll

+ **How familiar are you with the concept of asset-based language?**

  1. **Very familiar**
  2. **Somewhat familiar**
  3. **Unfamiliar**

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Poll

+ **Has your team done any work to date to adapt your messaging to reflect asset-based language?**

   1. Yes
   2. No
   3. Unsure

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Deficit-Based Language

+ **What is deficit-based framing?**

  + Defining people by their circumstances.

Asset-Based Language

+ **What is asset-based framing?**

  + Defining people by their aspirations and contributions.

Asset-Based Language

+ **Mission and value statements from social impact organizations often contain deficit-based framing.**

  + **Deficit-based framing:** *"We feed students in low-income communities."*
  + **Asset-based framing:** "With proper nutrition, students develop the skills and confidence needed to create the future they want for themselves, for their communities, and for us all."

Deficit-Based Language

- Trabian Shorters, BMe

Deficit-Based Language

subgroup

"those people"

disadvantaged

under-performing & low-performing

minority

cycle of poverty

at-risk

school-to-prison pipeline

achievement gap

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Deficit-Based Headlines

+ *Why Does America Have So Many Hungry Kids?*

+ *Rocketship Academy Prospers in Crime-Ridden D.C. Neighborhood*

+ *What Happens When Homeless People Just Want to Stay on the Streets?*

How Can We Reframe This Language?

+ Deficit-Based Approach	+ Asset-Based Language
Needs-driven	
Problems-focused	
External focus	
What is missing that we must find?	
Training community members	

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Potential Reframes

+ Deficit-Based Approach	+ Asset-Based Language
Needs-driven	Strengths-driven
Problems-focused	Opportunity-focused
External focus	Internal focus
What is missing that we must find?	What is present that we can build upon?
Training community members	Equipping community members

How Can We Reframe This Language?

+ Deficit-Based Language	+ Asset-Based Language
Low-income families	
Disadvantaged children	
Homeless people	
Hunger	
There is a need	
[Org] feeds students.	

Potential Reframes

+ Deficit-Based Language	+ Asset-Based Language
Low-income families	Families facing economic hardship
Disadvantaged children	Children who confront barriers to opportunity
Homeless people	People who are unhoused
Hunger	Food insecurity
There is a need	There is an opportunity
[Org] feeds students.	Students receive healthy meals from [Org].

Asset-Based Language

+ Avoid **leading with negatives** when introducing a group of people or a place.
+ Include **asset-framed stories.**
+ Center **root causes.**
+ Make challenges feel **solvable.**
+ Lead with **shared values.**
+ Use language that reflects that **systemic disparities exist.**
+ **Describe those systems explicitly** whenever possible.
+ Acknowledge that **harm has been done,** and that **these are not self-caused problems.**

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Shifting the narrative in work

BEFORE

+ "...a Washington, D.C. **charity that feeds and clothes the poor and offers day care and after-school programs**, with a total budget of $4.5 million..."

AFTER

+ "A **D.C.-based nonprofit organization which supports strong children, families, and communities with a fierce commitment to equity**, has announced new program membership policies for its **no-cost Outfitters clothing boutique** in Ward 8."

+ "A **local food access and education nonprofit** is teaming up with ride-hailing company Lyft to combat a glaring grocery store access issue in Wards 7 and 8."

Asset-Based Storytelling

+ **How inflation affects food insecurity**
  By Michel Martin
  January 16, 2022

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Centering Stakeholders

+ Always put the **person first.** Instead of "poor children," consider using **"children experiencing economic insecurity."** Don't define a community by what it lacks, define it by what it has: **love, dignity, determination and resourcefulness.**

+ Your organization, team should not be positioned as the solution, but as a **resource that supports the empowerment and centering of children, families and communities.**

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Centering Stakeholders

+ Consider reframing language to be equity-focused and stakeholder-centric using a **1-2-3 Equity Framework:**

1. Start with the stakeholder;
2. State the work;
3. Explain how your organization is involved & how all benefit.

Centering Stakeholders

+ An example: "**SNAP helps parents afford groceries**, *but many newly eligible families may not know they qualify, or how to sign up.*"

  + This could be reframed to **start with the stakeholder** and **give the stakeholder agency**. Consider the below reframe:

    + "***Parents and families can use SNAP benefits*** *to offset the cost of groceries, but many newly eligible families may not know they qualify or the process by which to sign up.*"

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NOPREN's Mission

+ **Current: "*NOPREN is* a collaborative, equity-focused applied research network that informs policies and practices designed to improve nutrition and prevent obesity."**

+ **Consider: "To support families with improved nutrition and to prevent obesity,** NOPREN designs policies and practices through a collaborative, equity-focused applied research network."

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Best Practices

+ Deploy **data points with a purpose.**

+ How did we get here? Stats alone don't tell people why you are sharing that statistic. **Don't forget why you are telling the story.**

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Best Practices

+ Avoid **rugged individualism** and **savior narratives.**

  + **Success stories** can promote the fallacy of rugged individualism. When telling a success story, **take time to call out the many supports** that were required to overcome system-caused obstacles and challenges, and explain why not everyone can access them.

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Best Practices

+ **Images matter.** Are your photos asset-based?

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Hunger hits Black communities harder

The Black community consistently faces hunger at higher rates than whites due to social, economic, and environmental challenges. **In 2020, 1 in 5 Black individuals may have experienced food insecurity** - more than twice the rate of white households.

No One Can Thrive on an Empty Stomach

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, 42 million people may face hunger in the U.S. — including more than 13 million children. Hunger knows no boundaries — it touches every community in the U.S., including your own.

Learn more about the facts, and the impact, of hunger in the U.S. ›

Hunger Hurts Kids Every Day
Your Donation Helps Feed Them

Is This Just Political Correctness?

+ No! The North Star is **truth telling.**

Reframing Language

Language Considerations

+ **Original:** *"School and out-of-school time (OST) meals programs are critical resources for children, yet **they are not always designed in partnership with kids, teens, and their families.** When programs are designed using a "top down" approach that excludes community input and involvement, **they risk decreasing kids' access to and excitement for the meals served.**"*

Language Considerations

+ **Original:** *"School and out-of-school time (OST) meals programs are critical resources for children, yet **they are not always designed in partnership with kids, teens, and their families.** When programs are designed using a "top down" approach that excludes community input and involvement, **they risk decreasing kids' access to and excitement for the meals served.**"*

+ **Consider:** "**Children and families are invaluable thought partners in designing** the school and out-of-school time (OST) meals programs that are specifically developed to promote their health and well-being. **When families are involved at the beginning of the process and provide feedback throughout**, families are more able to access and are more excited about the meals served, and a greater number of children receive healthy and nutritious meals."

Language Considerations

+ **Original:** *"Trash and messes, other commonly cited concerns, can be overcome by **training students to pick up after themselves** and coordinating with school nutrition and custodial staff."*

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+ **Original:** *"Trash and messes, other commonly cited concerns, can be overcome by* **training students to pick up after themselves** *and coordinating with school nutrition and custodial staff."*

+ **Potential Reframe: "Students, in partnership with school nutrition and custodial staff, can work together** at the end of each meal to clean and restore dining areas."

Language Considerations

+ **Original: "_The founding and visionary school principal Dr. Yvonne Chan, plus a team of dedicated teachers_** _of what was then Vaughn Street Elementary, turned around_ **the lowest-ranking school** _in Los Angeles Unified toward a bold new vision for education._ **This vision took decision-making to the community level,** _witnessed a dramatic turnaround in student achievement, and garnered national recognition for its success."_

Language Considerations

+ **Original: "*The founding and visionary school principal Dr. Yvonne Chan, plus a team of dedicated teachers*** *of what was then Vaughn Street Elementary, turned around* **the lowest-ranking school** *in Los Angeles Unified toward a bold new vision for education.* **This vision took decision-making to the community level,** *witnessed a dramatic turnaround in student achievement, and garnered national recognition for its success.*"

+ **Consider "The students** at Vaughn Street Elementary School **performed better** during the tenure of Dr. Yvonne Chan and a team of dedicated teachers. **Community members co-created a bold new vision for education.** With the support of this vision, **students achieved** at a level that garnered national recognition."

Language Considerations

+ **Original:** *"Our region only prospers when **all of its people** and communities prosper."*

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Language Considerations

+ **Original:** *"Our region only prospers when **all of its people** and communities prosper."*

+ **Consider:** "When **Black, Latina/o/x and Indigenous people and other people of color prosper,** our region thrives."

Q&A

Action Items

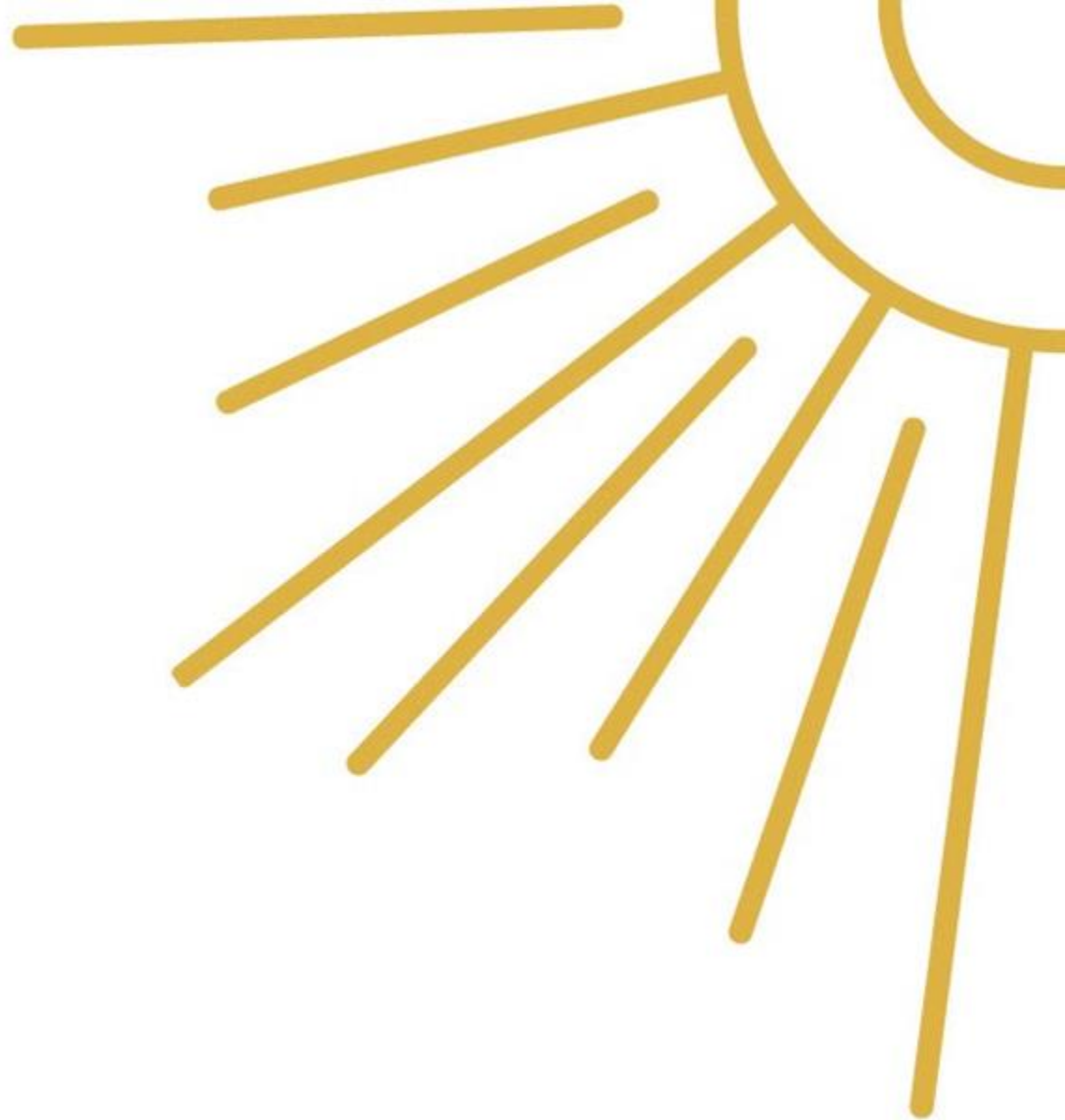+ **What are some tangible next steps we can take?**

Action Items

+ Conduct an **audit of your resources.**

+ **Identify messaging frames** in your team's lexicon that are **potentially deficit-based**; discuss together.

+ **Train and support colleagues** as you transition to more asset-based language and narratives.

+ **Evaluate your work periodically** as the field evolves.

Poll

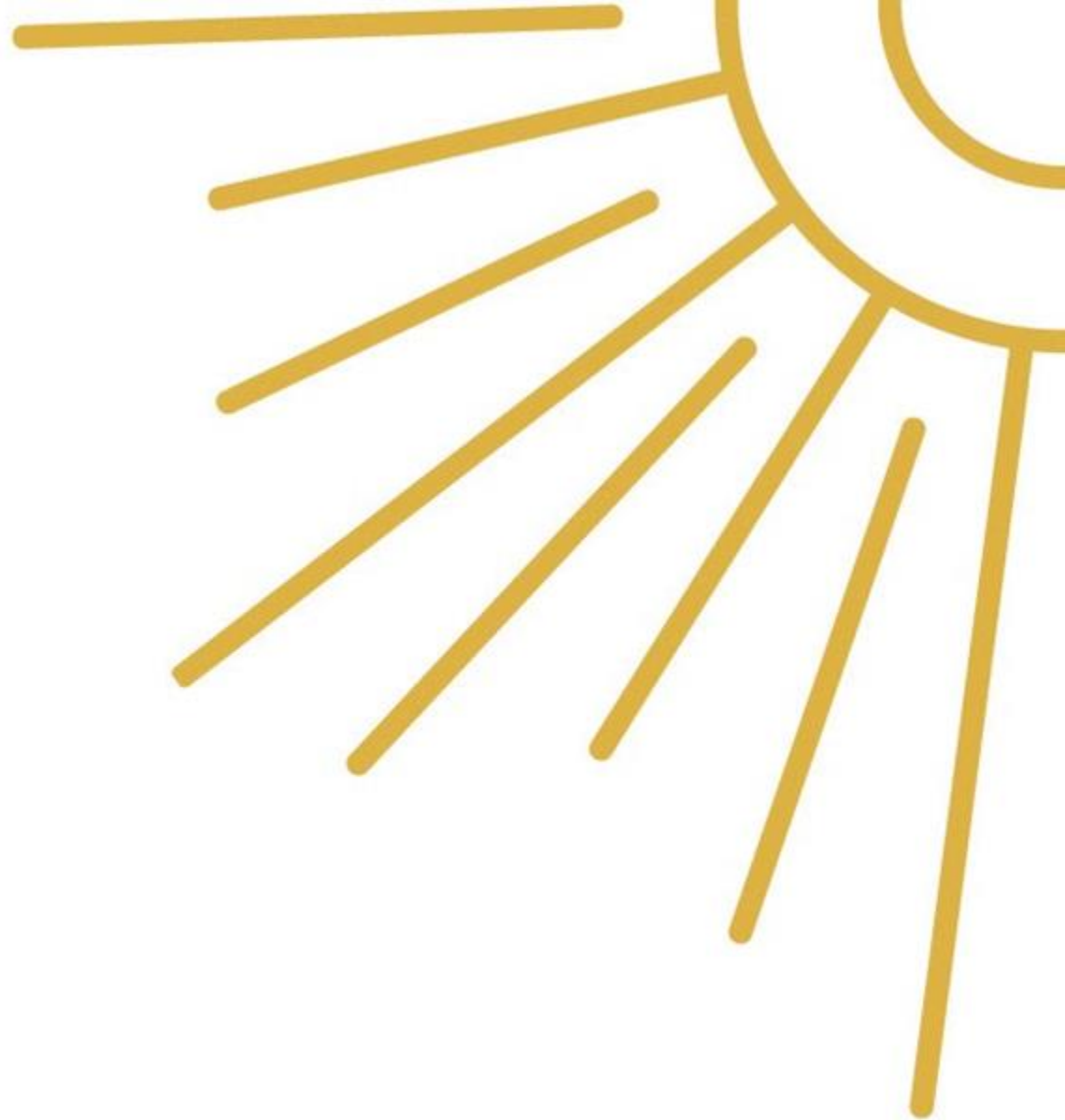+ **How are you feeling after today's session?**

   1. More confident
   2. More competent
   3. Need more practice

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Thank you!

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Appendix

Language Considerations

+ **Original:** *"**Poor nutrition** is more common among **low-income** and food insecure Americans, who may lack convenient access to healthy food retail outlets."*

+ **Consider: "Americans who live in more affluent communities, with greater access to healthy food** retailers, are more likely to eat nutritious meals."

Asset-Based Language

+ **Missions and value statements from social impact organizations often contain deficit-based framing.**

  + Deficit-based framing: "We help **at-risk youth in high-crime** neighborhoods."
  + Asset-based framing: "We support young people to overcome obstacles and **achieve their dreams**."