



# A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR COMMUNICATING GLOBAL JUSTICE & SOLIDARITY



An alternative to the language of  
development, aid and charity



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This guide has been produced by Framing Matters for Health Poverty Action (HPA), in association with the Public Interest Research Centre and the following members of the Progressive Development Forum: Medact, NEON, PHM UK, PHM West and Central Africa and Viva Salud. It is the result of six workshops conducted with key HPA staff members, followed by a further workshop attended by the following organisations; HPA, Global Justice Now, Medact, NEON and War on Want.

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# A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR COMMUNICATING GLOBAL JUSTICE AND SOLIDARITY

**An alternative to the language of development, aid and charity**

## WHAT IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

The way we talk about global issues affects how people think, feel and react to them. Recognising that language has the power to create social change, we have produced this guide with the intention of setting out a different approach to communicating global issues—one that replaces the narrative of development, aid and charity, with one of global justice and solidarity. The work presented here will continue to be developed over time as we continue to research and test these messages.

## WHY IS IT NEEDED?

The current dominant story of poverty that is told in the global North is one narrowly focused on charity, aid and so called “international development”. It is one that tells us that poverty and inequality can be overcome simply by “us” giving to “others”.

While aid—in different forms—is vital, the story that it is the primary solution to poverty and inequality is limited and damaging. It acts as a smokescreen distracting us from demanding action on the real issues that create and maintain global poverty, such as unjust trade deals, climate change, tax havens, the failed “war on drugs” and the lack of public services. It also presents citizens of the global North as the generous saviours of the global South, undermining global solidarity and cementing power dynamics in a way that breeds paternalistic notions of countries in the global South as poor and reliant on our help.

With a more conscious approach to how we communicate we can move beyond this damaging narrative, ensuring that we share effective messages on poverty and inequality, inspire people to take effective action and minimise any unintended harm we may be doing.

## WHO IS IT FOR?

It is for any activist, organisation, social movement or civil society group who wants to be able to effectively communicate about global justice and solidarity—in a way that helps to achieve a sustainable, equal society where everyone is able to live a healthy life and realise their human rights.

Given where the common language used to describe poverty and inequality has emerged, the guide is particularly relevant to those in the global North who have a responsibility to counter these harmful ways of communicating. However we hope that the principles outlined here will also prove useful for allies in the global South.

## **HOW TO USE IT?**

Each section of the guide has been designed to give us a brief introduction to that section, some examples highlighting what it means in practice, as well as advice and exercises to help us apply it to our work.

The advice in the guide will be most effective when taken all together, but each section is self-contained so we can refer to specific sections should it be more helpful to us at the time.

The guide also comes with two posters which summarise its key messages. We can print these out and keep them with us when working on our communications to help remember the key points.

## **BE KIND TO YOURSELF, THIS IS A LEARNING PROCESS**

Although a lot of the recommendations in this guide are common sense, putting them into practice can be a challenge. Old habits can be difficult to break and it can be time consuming to look over our work with a critical eye.

However, it only gets easier and it will soon become second nature the more we practice it.

We also recognise that it is not possible to follow all of the advice in this guide all of the time. We have ourselves, on occasions, used words and phrases that we advise against using. At points, this is because we lack a suitable alternative (sometimes damaging ways of communicating are so ingrained it can be difficult to find useful alternatives), and at other times this is because using this language helps make our message clear.

The point is to try and follow this advice as much as possible given what is realistic.

# FRAMING MATTERS

## HOW LANGUAGE AFFECTS OUR THINKING

Too often, we dismiss communications as an add on or something we do to further our other work. We can fail to recognise that we are communicating our messages all the time, and whether we acknowledge it or not, this is shaping how people understand the issues we work on.

Social psychology and cognitive linguistics (see resources below) have shown us that how we communicate issues actually changes how we respond to them. For example, if we describe people seeking refuge or those convicted of a crime as “migrants” and “criminals”, we bring to mind many unhelpful associations that change the way we think and feel about these groups. This, in turn, will impact how we act towards these groups. Not all differences of language are so dramatic, but even subtle changes in words used can trap us into certain ways of thinking and acting. If we always describe a problem in the same way we will always come up with the same set of answers.

## WHAT IS FRAMING AND WHY IT MATTERS

The following guide is a way of introducing framing into our work. Framing is an approach that seeks to show how words, phrases and experiences bring to mind certain associations, and how these associations can then change the way we think and feel about something. For example, not many people will have had a nanny, yet we know exactly what the frame “nanny state” is referring to because we have heard it so many times in the media. Whether we agree with it or not, when we hear the phrase “nanny state” the idea that the government is too interventionist is brought to mind.

We often use terms and phrases in our work that bring to mind and reinforce unhelpful associations without even knowing that we are doing so. An understanding of framing helps us consciously examine our communications for potentially unseen harm they may be doing and seek more helpful alternatives. Language is key to creating change and showing that it is possible.

Frames are not just language, they can be images or even places. For example, what frame does the House of Commons reinforce with its gold leaf and red carpets? It is important to remember all of the recommendations in this guide can be applied to images as well as text.

## FRAMING THEORY

In order to make this guide as easy to use on a daily basis, we have tried to keep the theory behind this work to a minimum. We have given links to further reading throughout the document to help us find out more as we go.

## READ MORE ABOUT FRAMING

Should you want a little more depth, a good place to start are the introductions of the [“Framing Nature”](#) toolkit by PIRC, and the [“Framing Equality”](#) toolkit by PIRC and ILGA-Europe.

To read more about social psychology or cognitive linguistics relevant to framing, see the [“Common Cause Handbook”](#) by PIRC and the work of [George Lakoff](#).

# PRINCIPLES & CONTENTS



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## Remember...

This is a learning process, we may not always get the message perfect, but it is important to be mindful of the language we are using and the consequences of using it.

# 01 ASK WHY WE ARE COMMUNICATING

**Be clear about the purpose of our communications. What do we want people to think, feel or do when they read our communications?**

There is a constant need to communicate under time pressure, whether that be creating new content or responding to the ever changing media and policy agenda. Whatever we are drafting—social media comment, press release, fundraising message or statement of policy—the same rules apply.

First ask **why we are communicating** and then ask how we can do it in a way that is helpful.

There are some important aspects to think about before communicating:

## 1. THE OBJECTIVE

Start by thinking about what our objective is.

- What is the goal of our campaign and what is the goal of the specific communication?
- How do they fit together?
- Are we trying to change people's minds or encourage them to do something, like sign a petition or donate money?

## 2. THE AUDIENCE

Then think about our audience.

- Who do we want to speak to?
- What do they already care about?
- How can we find out more about them?
- What do we want our audience to think, feel or do as a result of seeing our communication?

## 3. THE OUTCOME

Think about how we are going to measure our outcome. How will we know we have been successful? Make sure the indicator of success matches the desired outcome. For example, if our goal is to change people's views on poverty, maybe the number of shares on a social media post is not a good outcome indicator. Instead, maybe we could survey people about their likelihood to take action after reading the message.

It might also be important to think about testing our communications before we publish them, for example by A B testing or surveys (see the [“Testing Comms Guide”](#) by PIRC).





## **More Info**

Framing Equality Toolkit by PIRC & ILGA-Europe.

Testing Comms Guide by PIRC and ILGA-Europe.

## **IN PRACTICE**



### **Only respond to something if we have a reason to**

Think about any potential damage engaging could have, and how much benefit it will actually create. Sometimes adding oxygen to an unhelpful story, especially when we cannot control how we will be quoted or interviewed, may lead to longevity and cause us to fall into communication traps (see Section 8). If we feel we need to respond, think about how we can do this in a way that fosters helpful beliefs (see Section 9).

### **Always ask ourselves why we are communicating**

If we have time, write down the goal of the communication or campaign. If not, ask ourselves “*what do we hope to achieve by creating this message?*”

### **Get on the front foot**

Have our own messages prepared. Make sure that when we are interviewed or quoted, we have our point in clear and concise language that does not repeat the language of the opposition (see Section 8).

## **EXERCISE: Putting it into practice**



The following is an amended version of the framing task exercise created by PIRC.

It would be worth reading the whole guide (especially Section 9) before tackling this exercise.

- What is the objective of the message/campaign?
- What is the outcome we ultimately want to achieve?
- What do we want our audience to do in order to contribute to this outcome?
- How do we want them to feel?
- What do we want them to believe?
- What unhelpful ideas or beliefs do we want to avoid reinforcing?
- How will we tell if our communication has been successful?

## 02 BE CLEAR ABOUT THE CAUSES OF THE PROBLEM

**Make it clear why a problem exists using language that is easy to understand.**

There are many reasons why we don't communicate the causes of problems clearly. It might be oversight, a policy decision, fundraising implications or just that it is really complicated. Whatever the reason, this lack of clarity is unhelpful to our audience. If we want people to act, we need to give a clear narrative about the cause of the problem, the solution and their role in achieving it.

As causes can be complicated and interconnected, don't be afraid to break problems down into simpler chunks—we can still infer there is more to a problem, but doing this allows us not to get too bogged down in detail.

When we do this, there are 3 key things to be aware of:

1. Make sure that the **solution is proportionate** to the scale of the problem in hand, otherwise solving the problem does not appear to be possible to the reader.
2. It is typically unhelpful to portray people as evil or villains as it makes it seem less likely that they can change. **Try to focus on changing the system rather than highlighting one rogue individual** (this is related to the other character issues in [Section 6](#)).
3. It is also unhelpful to make **it seem like achieving change is all about individual responsibility**. We have to be clear that bigger change is needed from government and corporations.

### IN PRACTICE

**Make the cause of the problem as clear and concise as possible:** don't get bogged down in detail. Break the cause down into smaller parts if needed. For example, sentences like *“poor health and poverty continue because many governments pursue policies which prioritise corporations over the wellbeing of citizens”* highlight the cause of the problem without going into too much complex detail.

**Highlight the cause not the symptom:** for example, while the media might concentrate on the number of people migrating to Europe, it ignores the bigger picture of causes like war, poverty and inequality. Whenever possible, bring the cause into the message. For example, don't just say *“migrants are coming to the UK”* say *“people seeking refuge are coming to the UK because of war, poverty and inequality”*.

**Make sure the solution fits the problem:** the solutions we offer must be of a scale that makes the issue seem solvable. While we might ask people to make smaller actions, like sharing something on social media or donating, these must fit into the bigger picture of a proportionate solution (see [Section 3](#)). For example, **DON'T SAY** *“we can all stop climate change by making small changes to our daily actions”*, **DO SAY** *“while making changes to our behaviours (like recycling and taking the bus) will contribute to stopping climate change, we also need to demand action from governments and corporations”*.

**Ensure we do not parrot unhelpful messages** (see [Section 8](#)): be careful to not simply repeat messages that might be unhelpful to our cause. For example, **DON'T SAY** *“poverty is not natural”* **DO SAY** *“poverty is created”*.





## More Info

Framing the Economy by NEON, NEF, Frameworks Institute & PIRC.

Common Cause for Nature by PIRC.

How Do We Frame Our Way Out of This Mess? by PIRC.



**Point to systemic problems:** the “Framing the Economy” project (see above) showed that a computer program is a useful metaphor for describing the economic system. We could use this metaphor and say “*Poverty is created, it is a result of a system that has been programmed to serve a small elite who are profiting from this unjust system*”. Notice that the focus is on the system that serves the elite, rather than the elites themselves (see Section 4).

**Link personal responsibility to larger change:** if we put too much emphasis on individual action and don’t reference bigger changes—like legislation—we run the risk of making people feel overwhelmed and fatalistic. For example, when discussing health we should avoid saying “*it is up to the individual to live a healthy life*”. Instead say “*we need policy in place that protects our right to health and allows us to lead healthy lives*”.



## SHOW: What images should we use?

Focus on images that show collective action rather than individuals. Avoid overdoing threat when showing the problem—we don’t want people to feel overwhelmed.



## EXERCISE 1: Getting our story straight

This can help us with our organisations story or for specific projects we are working on.

- › What are the 3 biggest problems that your organisation is working on?
- › Write them down in a paragraph and think about the following: What is wrong with the system? Who are the actors? How can it be fixed? How do the medium and long term goals fit together?
- › Now revisit what you have written for an audience of 12 year olds. Make it as clear and concise as possible. Use this tool to highlight complicated words <https://xkcd.com/simplewriter>.



## EXERCISE 2: Putting it into practice

Go through these questions when reviewing material you have written—this can help us find things we want to recreate from our previous communications as well as highlight things we might want to avoid. Read your own materials and ask yourself the following questions:

Is it clear what the problem is? Is it clear what the cause is? Is it clear what the solution is? Is the solution proportionate to the problem? Is it clear what role people can play?

Also see Exercise 2 in Section 5.

## 03 SHOW THAT CHANGE IS POSSIBLE

**Highlight previous successful changes to make future ones seem more likely. Tell a story that supports the role people have in creating change.**

Avoid any messaging that leads to people feeling fatalistic. Highlight the problems but also show change is possible and give people hope. There are a number of ways we can do this. Firstly, point to similar change that has already happened—highlighting successful campaigns and actions make current ones seem more likely to work.

Secondly, balance threat with positives. Using too much threat can lead to people feeling overwhelmed and unmotivated. This means that when we highlight the problem, we not only have to provide a solution, but also one that seems proportionate to the issue at hand.

Psychologist Nicki Hare (see link top right) suggests we should try and balance every negative with three positives, but even going for one is a good start.

### **IN PRACTICE**



#### **Point to great stuff that has already happened/is happening**

Make sure we point to action or change that has already happened when we are asking people to do something. For example, *“hundreds of people all across the world are already mobilising against cuts to healthcare spending”* or *“last year, campaigns in Gloucestershire successfully lobbied the local council to not to fire their NHS workers and replace them with contract workers, we can do the same”*.

#### **Stay positive and don't overdo threat**

Ensure that we provide some positives in our messages, and do not overwhelm people when we describe the problem. For example, sentences like *“poverty is a real problem for many people, but together we can make governments act to create a fairer and more just system”* make change seem possible without highlighting the threat of what would happen if the status quo continued.

#### **Name a specific place or project**

The actions highlighted do not necessarily need to be detailed but should help to create a feeling that change is possible and happening. This is a good example—*“In many places around the world people are pursuing alternative policies that improve people's health, strengthen public health systems, reduce inequality and improve people's lives. Local people have shown this approach is possible with their work in Guatemala to create opportunities for indigenous people to access healthcare”*.

#### **Provide proportionate solutions and give people a role**

The classic example here is climate change. Too often, communications ask people to change the lightbulbs they use while ignoring the huge changes needed by government and corporations. It's OK to ask people to take these actions, but they must also be part of calling for bigger changes too (also see the climate change example in [Section 2](#)).



## More Info

How Do We Frame Our Way Out of This Mess? by PIRC.  
Psychology for a Better World by Niki Harré.



### SHOW: What images should we use?

Show people taking action. Whether it is a protest or just going about their jobs, seeing people being part of the solution is motivating.



### EXERCISE: Referencing success stories

**Make a reference list of good stuff that has already happened including:**

1. All the successful projects you have done that you could reference
2. All of the successful projects other organisations have done
3. Things local people and grassroots movements have done
4. All of the things achieved in countries that could apply to your situation

This list should then be an updatable resource to draw from when we are creating communications. We could even come together and create a database as a sector.

# 04 PAINT A PICTURE OF THE FUTURE

**In order to inspire and motivate people, give them something to work towards. It can be simple, but we need a vision, otherwise we are only defining ourselves by what we are not.**

There is a reason Martin Luther King had a dream and not a nightmare. Although this vision was only a small part of a bigger hard-won struggle, it was a positive suggestion of what the future could be.

Helping people to imagine a better future helps us **get on the front foot rather than simply defining ourselves by what we are against**. We are currently stuck with many of the biggest movements still defining themselves by what they are against, like de-growth and anti-capitalism, rather than new alternatives. It is not a simple task to define an alternative, but is one that we need to take on together if we are to be effective.

A vision is also an important positive counterpoint to the constant reminders we have about the problems we face. This has an important role in keeping messages positive (see [Section 4](#)). A vision does not have to be exhaustive in detail, but the more of a picture we can paint, the more evocative and emotive it will be.

For example, the Labour Party have created quite a successful short-hand for their vision as “*a country that works for the many, not just the privileged few*” This vision of a future internet in a [report](#) by Global Justice Now (see top right) also clearly brings to mind an alternative vision: “*There is an alternative vision for the internet, one that is far closer to the original idea of the internet as a commons—a place where humans come together to freely exchange knowledge, ideas and resources outside of both state and corporate control*”.



## **IN PRACTICE**

### **Make it clear what we are working towards**

For example “a world where we can all have our basic needs met and realising our human rights is possible”.

### **Ensure the situation does not seem insurmountable**

**DON'T SAY** phrases like “it seems inevitable that if things continue this way, poverty and inequality will continue to increase, while those at the top get richer and richer”.

**DO SAY** “poverty is created, together we can reprogramme the system to ensure that everyone benefits, not just those at the top”.

### **Be for something rather than against something**

**DON'T SAY** we are “*anti-poverty*”.

**DO SAY** we are “*for social justice and a fairer distribution of wealth*”.

### **Talk about our vision whenever we can**

Even if it is just a couple of words. For example, “*this is a significant step to the fairer and more just society*”.

### **Make our vision seem close to happening**

**DON'T SAY** “*because a more just society is possible*”.

**DO SAY** “*because a more just society is just around the corner*”.



## More Info

E-Pocalypse Now by Global Justice Now.

Carnage by Simon Amstel, a novel way to talk about the future.



## SHOW: What images should we use?

Something that evokes the feeling of our vision—think about images that represent the things we are striving for.

## EXERCISE: Closed eye reflection



This is a group exercise for 3–10 people, and requires 1 person to lead and facilitate.\*

### **Everyone sits in a circle, instructions for lead:**

1. Ask everyone to get comfortable and close their eyes.
2. Wait a couple of seconds and then quietly, but clearly, ask people to notice their feet on the ground and how it feels to be sitting.
3. Wait a while and then ask people to notice their breathing.
4. Now ask everyone to imagine a world where our work is no longer needed, where the issues we are working on are either solved or being significantly addressed.
5. Wait a while...
6. Now ask people to imagine waking in this new world. What does it look like? How does it feel? How do you feel to be there?
7. Wait a while...
8. Now ask, what do you hear on the news when you turn on your radio or look at your phone?
9. What is on the front page of the paper? How does it feel?
10. Now give people a little time to think and explore. You can prompt by saying something like “take a little time to go outside and explore this world”.
11. Wait a while...
12. Now say “when you feel comfortable doing so, open your eyes and come back into the room”.
13. Now get people to discuss in pairs what they felt and experienced.
14. Then, as a group describe the future you have seen. This should be the basis for your vision.

You will probably have to try it a few times to pace it correctly. It is important not to rush it or for people to get restless.

*\* This exercise requires you to close your eyes which can make people feel vulnerable, so only do it in a space and with people you feel comfortable with. If you are leading, let people know what is happening and ensuring they are happy to partake. Let them know what the exercise entails.*

## 05 UNDERSTAND WHAT'S MISSING

Often what we leave out of a message is just as important as what we put in. Leaving something out can change the way a problem is viewed.

What we choose to highlight, or overlook, has a tangible impact on how we approach a problem and how others feel about it. For example, if we don't mention governments, it is unlikely that people will see them as part of the problem or the solution.

When we talk about what is missing, we are talking about what we might expect to see but don't. For example, take the random headline "*Weakened aid budget may be used to fund \$2bn Pacific island infrastructure bank*". This does not mention who is using the aid? Why is the budget weakened and by whom? Obviously this is just a headline and the article may contain some of the answers, but it demonstrates the point.

There are 2 key areas where we need to pay attention to for this:

1. **The actors:** these could be people, places or things. For example, in this message a national park is an actor "*national park attracts thousands of visitors*". If we leave an actor, such as corporations/government/voters, out of a message, we will end up describing a problem differently and therefore advocating different solutions.
2. **The focus or big issue being given prominence:** for example, if we constantly point to poverty, but do not adequately highlight its causes, we run the risk of making it seem natural and inevitable (see [Section 2](#)).

### IN PRACTICE

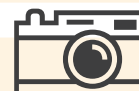
**Identify all the possible actors:** before communicating, list **as many** (even those we never talk about but are in some small way affected by the issue) possible "actors" as you can in the message. Think about how the inclusion of any of them will change the nature of our message and what the implied solution is. Make a conscious decision about which actors to include in the message and why.

**Question the roles and the focus:** if we are responding to an event or news, **don't just automatically use the same actors and focus** that have already been presented. Think about how introducing new elements or actors could change the story. For example, we could say "*the government is failing to provide proper healthcare for citizens*" but that misses out a key actor—corporations. Instead we could bring corporations into the picture by saying "*governments are prioritising corporations whilst failing to provide healthcare for citizens*".

**Use an active voice:** when talking about our work and our actions, use an active voice. Using the passive voice can make things seem inevitable, unimportant or less interesting to our audience. For example, instead of saying "*foreign aid has been cut*", say "*government cuts foreign aid budget*", or "*government makes devastating cuts to aid budget*".

### SHOW: What images should we use?

Understand that the images we use will only contain certain characters or a certain focus. Be mindful of what we leave out.







## More Info

Don't think of an Elephant by George Lakoff.

Common Cause for Nature by PIRC.

Framing Nature Toolkit by PIRC.

### EXERCISE 1: Shifting the focus



Take 5 random news headlines on an issue you work on, or on something completely different. Ignore the associated text and picture, just concentrate on the headlines (this is of course not a fair representation of the material, but it is good for practice).

- What is the focus of headline? What is given greatest importance?
- How does this focus make you feel about the issue? What is it making you think about?
- Are there other important parts of this issue that are not mentioned?
- How would the message be different if the focus changed?
- Who are the actors in the headline? (by actors we mean not just people or organisations but also places and objects that are doing something, or having something done to them).
- Which actors are missing? Who is conspicuous by their absence?
- How would the message change if you included these actors?

Rewrite the headline with a different focus and different actors.

### EXERCISE 2: Ask yourself why



This exercise will help you identify what could be missing from a message. You could use it on any text or image as practice, or on your own materials before sharing them. This exercise would also be a really useful when making sure we are clear of the causes in Section 2.

For example, take the sentence *"1.6 million people died from Tuberculosis in 2017"*:

- Why? Treatment for tuberculosis exists but people cannot access it
- Why? It is too expensive
- Why? Pharmaceutical companies charge way above the production costs for the treatment
- Why? Because they can
- Why? These practices are protected by Intellectual Property Rights
- Why? Current economic policies prioritise corporations over the health & wellbeing of citizens
- Why? ...

Now list all of the actors and different areas of focus that are evident from your list. Check if your message includes all of them. Are there any missing that are important to the message? Rewrite the message to include any key actors or areas of focus that are missing.

## 06 CHARACTERS MATTER!

**Build solidarity and highlight the similarities between different groups. Avoid portraying anyone as a helpless victim.**

“Othering” means using language that distances another group from ourselves. It can be subtle (emphasising slight differences in culture or behaviour) to overtly offensive (describing groups as waves or swarms).

Whenever we create messages, we need to try to be as inclusive as possible. **Highlight the similarities between us and others to build global solidarity**, or at the very least, work hard to avoid highlighting the differences that creates an “us” and “them” dynamic.

Although it is key that we highlight the problems we are facing, we must not portray those we are working with as helpless victims. This serves to reinforce an unhelpful world view about how and why poverty exists.

It is also unhelpful to talk about heroes and villains (see Sections [2](#) and [7](#)).



### **IN PRACTICE**

#### **Avoid othering**

For example, say “*people seeking refuge*” rather than “*refugees*”, and instead of “*poor people*” or “*sick people*”, say “*people living in poverty*” or “*people denied access to money or healthcare*”.

#### **Highlight systemic problems**

See more information on this in [Section 2](#).

#### **Avoid victimising**

Talk about people making change, and avoid phrases that lack context and present individuals as vulnerable. Good examples of victimising come from mainstream charity adverts that ask us to “*donate now to help save lives*”, often accompanied by an image of an individual living in poverty without any context. Instead, we can show images of people actively making change with text like “*stand with activists in Kenya as they work to tackle the causes of poverty in their own communities*”.

#### **Talk about solidarity**

Talk about standing in solidarity with those working to tackle the root causes of poverty—not “*helping*” people or “*giving*” people a better way of life. For example, “*we stand in solidarity with those working to improve health and challenge the causes of poverty.*”

#### **Have people tell their own story and include the voices of those affected**

Say “*making sure the voices of those most affected are heard*” not “*giving people a voice*”—they already have a voice. Include quotes, stories and videos of those affected, providing a platform for their messages.



## More Info

[How Do We Frame Our Way Out of This Mess?](#) by PIRC.

[Common Cause Communication: A Toolkit for Charities](#) by Common Cause Foundation.



## SHOW: What images should we use?

Show images of people creating change—marching, protesting, building stuff and proactively taking care of their own lives.

Avoid showing people as helpless victims (individuals shown out of context on blank background with threat inducing black and red design), lone heroes (this can be people or organisations) or villains. All of these characterisations make it more difficult for us to think that people or things can change.

Avoid othering by consciously thinking about how the image portrays difference. Exoticism (style or traits considered characteristic of a distant foreign country) can lead to othering and fetishisation, just as classic poverty porn does.



## EXERCISE: Putting it into practice

Get some press releases, adverts, fundraising appeals and news clippings by your organisation and others.

Concentrating on a single sentence or headline, answer these questions:

1. Who are the actors in the frame? (these might be people or objects).
2. Who has the power?
3. Is anyone being portrayed as different or lesser?

Now reframe the headline or sentence:

- What changes could you make to the actors in the frame and the roles they are given?
- Experiment by giving the actors different roles.
- Which works best in terms of being helpful to your cause?

# 07 ORGANISATIONS SHOULDN'T BE LONE HEROES

**It's about collective action. Instead of making our organisations out to be lone heroes, talk about how we have worked with others in partnership.**

It is important to think about how we present ourselves and what this says about us, and our work, to those reading our messages. If we never ask our supporters to do anything apart from give us money, we are establishing a transactional relationship, presenting our organisations as those heroically doing all the work and missing out on an opportunity to engage and mobilise supporters on the issues we work on.

Common asks like “*donate to us so we can save lives*” and “*your contribution allows us to make a difference*” paint our organisations as heroes addressing the issue, while our audience are passive and unable to take action themselves. This is likely to reinforce the belief that all we need to do to tackle poverty is give money to “others”—not systemic change and solidarity (see [Section 9](#)).

**We need to ask for donations, but when doing this, make sure we also give supporters an opportunity to engage with the issue. Ensure that we outline why we are asking for donations in a way that engages helpful values (See [Section 10](#) and [Appendix](#)), and whenever possible, give people the option to also take other actions that address the root of the issue.**

If your organisation is trying to move away from this traditional supporter relationship, words like “*charity*” or “*development*” (see [Sections 8](#) and [9](#)) might be unhelpful as they are likely to bring to mind traditional views of aid.

Think about how to best to describe your organisation without using these words—for example, “*social justice organisation*” or “*organisation tackling the root causes of poverty*”.

We also need to be careful how we talk about the work we do. We want to avoid portraying our work—whether that be a project, programme or campaign—as the sole solution to the issue. Avoid phrases like “*without our work, poverty in this community would continue*” or “*with our help, this community has overcome this disease*”. Instead, we need to show ourselves as “*standing with*” or “*working with*” communities.

## **SHOW: What images should we use?**



Try to use images of those affected working in their own countries on the issue.



## More Info

Common Cause for Nature by PIRC.

Framing Nature Toolkit by PIRC.

## IN PRACTICE



### **Talk about collective action, not heroic acts**

Ensure that we do not portray ourselves as the lone hero. We should always be looking to highlight how we “*work with*” or “*stand with*” others. For example, **DON'T SAY** “*we are helping those living in poverty*”, **DO SAY** “*we stand in solidarity with those addressing the root causes of poverty in their own communities*”.

### **Avoid portraying our work as charitable**

If we don't want to be viewed as a charity, avoid language traditionally associated with charities (see [Section 8](#)). This includes words like “*charity*”, “*aid*”, “*help*” and “*giving*”. Giving is often about power, we don't want to “*give to*”, we want to “*stand with*”.

### **Celebrate why we care**

Highlight what is important to us about the work we are doing. This will often be why our supporters care too. For example, say “*we want a fairer and more just world*”.

### **Say what matters to us when asking for donations**

Ensure that we state the reason we care about the issue in ways that are likely to engage helpful values (see [Section 10](#) and [Appendix](#)).

## EXERCISE: Communicating collective action



This exercise is simple...

Take a moment to think about the achievements of your organisation.

List the five things you are most proud of your organisation doing.

For each of your achievements, think of:

1. Three other groups or individuals that helped achieve each of these things.
2. The role your supporters played in achieving these things, directly or indirectly.

Now write a sentence about each of the 5 things you listed, highlighting the role these groups had in achieving it. Make sure you highlight collective action, and don't paint yourself as a hero.

Now look at materials you had previously written about these achievements, how do they compare to what you have just written?

## 08 ANIMAL TRAPS!

A guide to communication pitfalls. These categories are not mutually exclusive, a single message could be several of these categories.



### Refutation trap!

## PARROTS

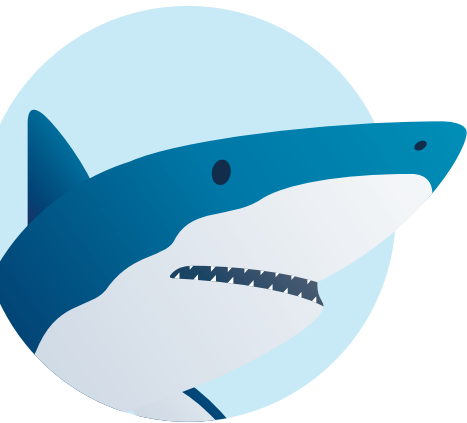
### DON'T JUST REPEAT BACK WHAT THEY SAY

When Nixon famously said “I am not a crook” it made everyone immediately think “he’s a crook”. Instead, he should have said “I am an honest man”. When we repeat an opponent’s unhelpful position, even to refute it, we are still reinforcing it.

### IN PRACTICE

**DON'T SAY** “poverty is not natural”.

**DO SAY** “poverty is created”.



### Contaminated language trap!

## SHARKS

### NEGATIVE ASSOCIATIONS (LIKE JAWS CREATED FOR SHARKS!)

Language that brings to mind unhelpful beliefs. Does the word or message evoke associations that are negative and unhelpful to us? Is there another word or a way of rephrasing our communications that evokes more helpful associations?

### IN PRACTICE

**AVOID** words like “migrant” or “asylum seeker”. Although they have some positive associations, they also have many negative ones due to unhelpful media coverage.

**DON'T SAY** “refugees” or “migrants”.

**DO SAY** “people seeking refuge” and actively bring people into the frame.



## More Info

Don't think of an Elephant by George Lakoff.



### Sanitising / Obscuring Trap!

## CHAMELEONS

### HIDING SOMETHING IN PLAIN SIGHT

This is euphemistic language that makes an issue sound less bad or damaging than it is. We want our message to reveal what is hidden and make the impacts clear.

#### IN PRACTICE

**DON'T SAY** “austerity”.

**DO SAY** “damaging cuts to public services” because that is what it really is.

**DON'T SAY** “collateral damage”.

**DO SAY** “the death of innocent civilians” because that’s what it is.



### Rose Tinted Trap!

## ROBINS

### POSITIVE ASSOCIATIONS THAT MIGHT NOT HELP OUR CAUSE

Words and phrases that already have very strong and set positive associations in people’s heads. Attempting to use this language to describe something as negative just doesn’t work because the positive associations are too strong—this could include words like “charity” and “aid”.

#### IN PRACTICE

**DON'T SAY** “Although ‘aid’ and ‘charity’ are necessary, they are not adequate on their own to address the root causes of poverty”.

**DO SAY** “Current approaches to poverty do not focus enough on how it is created”.

Another example is jobs. It is hard to talk about “bad jobs” as the frame of having any type of job is overwhelmingly positive in people’s minds (“you are lucky to have a job”).

**DON'T SAY** “Bad Jobs”.

**DO SAY** “Bad working conditions”.

# 09 PROMOTE HELPFUL WAYS OF SEEING THE WORLD

**Think about the beliefs the language we use brings to mind. Are these beliefs helpful to us and the wider cause?**

“*Enabling beliefs*”, a term coined by the framing experts at PIRC, are beliefs that are helpful for us to reinforce, while “*barrier beliefs*” are those that are unhelpful to our cause. For example, an enabling belief like “*people are nice*” reinforces the idea that they are likely to help others, while a barrier belief could be something like “*work hard and you will succeed*” suggesting that those who have not succeeded just haven’t worked hard enough.

A good example to demonstrate this are the terms “*charity*”, “*development*” and “*aid*”. These are likely to be terms that engage barrier beliefs as they carry associations that are unhelpful to our cause (see Rose tinted frames in [Section 8](#)). They serve to perpetuate a model that focuses on the symptoms of poverty rather than its root causes, and help to reinforce the beliefs that those in other countries are helpless while richer countries are somehow superior and free of poverty.

## **EXAMPLES OF ENABLING BELIEFS IN OUR SECTOR & HOW TO ENGAGE THEM:**

- 1. Everyone is equal and should be able to live healthy lives**  
**DO SAY:** we are all human, we are all equal, we all have a right to our health/shelter/etc.
- 2. The political and economic system is programmed to benefit a few**  
**DO SAY:** the current economic system has been programmed to serve only the interests of a few.
- 3. We need to stand in solidarity with people creating change (those affected are not helpless victims)**  
**DO SAY:** stand in solidarity, work together, take collective action, inclusion, stand with.
- 4. It is possible to change things for the better**  
**DO SAY:** change is possible and already happening, just look at...
- 5. We all have agency to create change**  
**DO SAY:** together we can create change, get involved with the growing movement for change.

## **EXAMPLES OF BARRIER BELIEFS & HOW NOT TO ENGAGE THEM:**

- 1. Those living in poverty are vulnerable victims that need our help**  
**DON'T SAY:** help those living in poverty, give those affected a voice, they need our help, we need to help them, poverty will continue without our help, our work has helped many out of poverty.
- 2. Poverty is natural, there is nothing we can do about it**  
**DON'T SAY:** people still need our help, people are trapped in a cycle of poverty.
- 3. Your poverty is your own fault (if you work hard you will succeed)**  
**DON'T SAY:** things that focus on individuals who have managed to get out of poverty by hard work—although this might be true, it implies that others have not worked as hard which is likely to be false.
- 4. People are greedy, they are only out to benefit themselves**  
**DON'T SAY:** this will also benefit you, aid will help our economy.
- 5. Poverty is not my problem**  
**DON'T SAY:** poverty happens to other people, “us” and “them”, people in Africa need your help.





## More Info

[Framing Equality Toolkit](#) by PIRC and ILGA-Europe.

[Give & Live—just don't confuse the two!](#) blog.

[Framing Nature Toolkit](#) by PIRC.

## IN PRACTICE



### **Think about the beliefs we might be engaging**

Whenever we write something, we should always look over it and ask “*what am I asking the reader to believe for this message to work for them?*”

### **Use language that reinforces enabling beliefs**

The examples listed on the last page will help with this.

## SHOW: What images should we use?



With any image we use think—what is this asking me to believe?

Then ask, is that helpful?

## EXERCISE: I do believe it



Get some materials from your sector, such as news items, adverts, press releases, blogs and tweets (about 5-10 different resources would be great).

Look through the materials you have gathered and focus on the text in each one. Ask yourself, what would the reader need to believe in order for this communication to work for them? (see examples above to demonstrate).

List all of the beliefs you find, and then sort them into helpful, unhelpful and not sure categories.

From this list:

- Pull out the top 5 helpful beliefs that you want to promote in your communications.
- Then make a list of the top 5 most unhelpful beliefs you want to avoid.
- You can then use and update these lists as references for all your communications.

# 10 MAKE OUR MESSAGE MOTIVATING AND TRUE TO OUR VALUES

**People care about justice and fairness. That should be a core element of our communications.**

“Instrumentalism” is an over complicated, but useful, word to describe when we use other possible benefits to justify the changes we want to bring. Campaigns like the “Pink Pound” sought to secure rights for LGBTQIA+ groups based on their contribution to the economy, rather than arguments based on equality and social justice.

Similarly, Bill Gates has argued that giving foreign aid helps America’s economy. The reason such arguments are problematic is that it raises questions like—what if a similar, much needed, program is found not to help America’s economy? Would the program still be worth doing? Such approaches undermine the moral and emotional arguments we have for the cause.

The reason these arguments are unhelpful is to do with their power to motivate. Research on human values, by Shalom Schwartz (see the [“Common Cause Handbook”](#)), reinforces this perspective. Every message we hear, see or experience reinforces certain values.

Values are our deepest motivations and are what drive us, but we are contradictory bundles of motivations that have the capability to value different things at different times. Different values can be engaged in us depending on how an experience or message is framed (see [“Framing Matters”](#) section above).

Studies (see top right) have shown that using messages that engage values of caring about people and the planet, creativity and being able to choose our own goals, help motivate people to take action. It has also been found that messages that include words relating to success, ambition and public image, make people feel less motivated to act on social and environmental issues.

This means that when people hear messages like *“join our cause today and receive a free toy”*, they are made to think about their own self-interest rather than a collective good.

## **SHOW: What images should we use?**



Look at the list of helpful values in the [Appendix](#) and ask if your image is appealing to any of those? Avoid images that focus on security, nationalism, self-interest, celebrity, power or achievement.



## More Info

[The Common Cause Handbook](#) by PIRC.

[Common Cause for Nature](#) by PIRC.

[Giving foreign aid helps America's economy](#) by Bill Gates.

[Give & Live—just don't confuse the two!](#) blog.

## IN PRACTICE



**Talk about why it matters to us:** for example, “*we believe everyone has the right to health, which is why we are campaigning against government policies that undermine NHS funding*”.

**Avoid using another argument to bolster the one we believe in:** for example, avoid the notion that we should only work to tackle poverty because it will benefit us, or that our supporters should support us because it will in some way benefit them. Phrases like “*a healthy population makes a booming economy*” should be avoided.

**Engage helpful values:** use words and phrase related to helpful values. For example, phrases like “*we believe that everyone cares about other people*” and “*all people deserve the same opportunities in life*” are drawing on values of caring about people. They are therefore likely to motivate people to want to take social actions.

The following 6 helpful values were seen to be the most important for achieving our collective goals during one of the workshops we ran to inform the content of this guide:

*Social justice; Equality; Being part of nature; A world at peace;  
Broad mindedness; Protecting the environment*

A list of other helpful values can also be found in the back of the guide (see [Appendix](#))

**Avoid unhelpful values:** avoid words and phrases that are likely to trigger unhelpful values in our readers. A good example of this is when people argue that improving health is good because it benefits the economy. Phrases like tackling poverty overseas “*is creating economic opportunity and trading partners for us in the future*” or is “*making our country more secure and prosperous*” trigger values of security, success and ambition.

## EXERCISE: Building an intrinsic vocabulary



Get the list of intrinsic or helpful values from the [Appendix](#).

- Look through them and determine which 5 you want to engage in your communications.
- Now write each of the 5 values on a piece of paper (one value per page).
- On each page, write phrases, words and draw pictures of things you think will engage this value. Also think of things that evoke similar feelings to that value. For example, the word “*caring*” would likely engage the value of love.
- Now try writing sentences about your work that are likely to engage these values, drawing on the words and phrases you have identified. This is to encourage you to experiment with values and messaging.

# 11 PRACTICE MAKES ~~PERFECT~~ BETTER...



Some practical ways to make this stuff stick.

Although much of the advice in this guide seems like common sense, ensuring that we always put it into practice can be difficult. **Simple stuff we can do now...**

## Make your own resources

### **Create a library of practical examples**

Make good and bad communication folders at work and encourage everyone to add and use them.

### **Make an easy to see list**

List the top 5 parrots and chameleons you want to avoid in a prominent place—review these each month and add the robins and sharks once you have got in the habit of doing this. Don't bite off more than you can chew to start with.

## Connect with people

### **Make a group chat**

Make a group chat to discuss recent framing in the news and/or your work—it could be people from your organisation or from you the sector.

### **Get a framing buddy**

Pair up with someone else interested in framing and messaging in your organisation and set up monthly meeting to discuss how you are getting on.

## Responding Checklist

When responding to anything, whether that be a social media post, news article or policy statement, always make sure we do the following:

- 1. Why do we need to respond?**  
First ask, do I really need to respond, and if so, why?
- 2. Who will hear our response and how?**  
Remember interviews and quotes can change what we want to say.
- 3. What is the key point we want to make?**  
No more than 3! Keep it simple.
- 4. Don't parrot**  
Don't just repeat our opposition's points, even if we are disputing what they say (see [Section 8](#)).
- 5. Don't get caught in debate and technical detail**  
Remember what our message is and repeat it. Keep it clear and concise.

## **New Message Checklist**

How much of this you can do will depend on the time available, but always try and do the “*Before you write anything*” step below.

### **BEFORE YOU WRITE ANYTHING**

- Why are you creating this communication?
- What are you trying to make people feel/think/do?
- Make sure you have a problem, cause and solution—(this might not be possible in a short communication but make sure people can easily find this information if they want to).
- What do you want the focus to be? Is there anything you are missing that could be important?
- Who are the key characters in your communication?
- What beliefs do you want to reinforce?
- What intrinsic values can you engage?

### **ONCE YOU HAVE A DRAFT**

- What is the focus?
- Are the problems and solutions clear?
- What is the cause of the problem?
- Do you reference change that has happened?
- What’s missing? Could adding different actors or changing the focus help?
- Who are the characters and how are they being portrayed?
- Check for traps and jargon! (See [Section 8](#)).
- What beliefs are you actually engaging?
- What values are you actually engaging?

### **ONCE YOU HAVE SOMETHING YOU ARE HAPPY WITH**

- Show it to a colleague.
- Show it to someone outside of your work sphere—just listen to their feedback, don’t tell them what you were trying to do (the message has to speak for itself).
- Respond to their comments and simplify if needed.

# 11 PRACTICE MAKES ~~PERFECT~~ BETTER...



Some more practical ways to make this stuff stick.

Stuff that takes a bit of planning...

## Meeting Plans

### IF YOU ONLY HAVE 5 MINUTES...

Get everyone to discuss good and bad examples of communications they have seen recently.



### IF YOU HAVE AN HOUR...

1. Make a list of as many examples of communication traps as you can.
2. Prioritise 5 which you think are the most important to avoid.
3. Work on ways to describe the issue that does not trigger the traps.
4. Share with colleagues.
5. Making this a monthly, or 3 monthly, meeting will help keep framing in people's minds, and will provide regular opportunities to practice.





## IF YOU HAVE A HALF DAY...

Start the meeting with a warm up

### Check in

5 minutes

In pairs, talk about a fun or interesting framing issue (see “[Framing Matters](#)” as a reminder) you have noticed—it doesn’t need to be work related. These could be news, books, film or TV. For example, “*I watched Indiana Jones and imagined it retold with him as a plundering villain taking treasures from other countries without permission*”.

### How well are you already doing

1 hour

Look through the sections in the guide—ask which of the recommendations (“In Practice”) are you currently doing well? Discuss in groups of 2-4. After half an hour go into a group discussion.

List all the things you are already doing well.

Then as a group summarise the 5 things you are doing best

Congratulate yourself, it is important to remind yourself of the great stuff you already do

### What you need to focus on next

1 hour

Ask which recommendations are you struggling with and why? Discuss in groups of 2-4.

After half an hour go into a group discussion. List all the things you are struggling with and why.

Then as a group, decide the 5 things that seem most important at this time for you to work on.

### Make a plan

1 hour

Now you have the list of 5 areas you need to work on. Again, in pairs or larger groups, discuss the following 3 prompt questions.

Is it something you have always struggled with or is about a specific issue? If it is around an issue, what makes it different? Have you recently seen examples of this being done well? Are others in different organisations struggling with the same thing? Can you work together with them?

How can you address this as a team? Make sure you also discuss tangible actions. Individually, and then together, answer the following to come up with your plan:

### 3 things you can do this week

These could be as simple as emailing someone or finding an example campaign

### 3 things you can do this month

This could be to run another meeting to discuss the issue more in depth.

### 3 things you or your organisation need to do long term

This could be training, strategy or research but something more significant.

# APPENDIX

## Intrinsic/helpful values & endnotes.

### INTRINSIC VALUES

**A World of Beauty:** beauty of nature & the arts

**A World at Peace:** free of war and conflict

**Broadmindedness:** tolerant of different ideas and beliefs

**Choosing Own Goals:** selecting own purposes

**Creativity:** uniqueness, imagination

**Curiosity:** interested in everything, exploring

**Equality:** equal opportunity for all

**Forgiveness:** willing to pardon others

**Freedom:** freedom of action and thought

**Helpfulness:** working for the welfare of others

**Honesty:** genuine, sincere

**Humility:** modest, self-effacing

**Independence:** self-reliant, self sufficient

**Inner Harmony:** at peace with myself

**Love:** deep emotional and spiritual intimacy

**Loyalty:** faithful to my friends, group

**Meaning In Life:** a purpose in life

**Privacy:** the right to have a private sphere

**Protecting The Environment:** preserving nature

**Responsibility:** dependable, reliable

**Self-Respect:** belief in one's own worth

**Social Justice:** correcting injustice, care for the weak

**Spiritual Life:** emphasis on spiritual not material matters

**True Friendship:** close, supportive friends

**Unity with Nature:** fitting into nature

**Variety:** filled with challenge, novelty & change

**Wisdom:** a mature understanding of life



# NOTES



Or doodles or whatever...

**IF YOU COULD GET EVERYONE IN THE  
WORLD TO BELIEVE ONE THING,  
WHAT WOULD IT BE AND WHY?**

