

# Building a Strong Frame



## Reorganizing points makes a difference

**When we are immersed in an issue and want to get others to care, we often begin our communications with a statement of the problem—and sometimes, we end them there, too. But this formula often fails to have the intended effect. When we skip over the deeper explanation of how a problem comes to be, we miss opportunities to build lasting public understanding. And if we fail to emphasize the solutions that could improve the situation, people often assume that there isn't anything to be done. Worse yet, they may gravitate toward ideas that won't work.**

Luckily, there is a framing fix. A generic outline is provided to explain how to best frame the proposed solution, as well as four examples that apply the outline to the topic of tobacco-related health disparities. The technique involves leading with an aspirational principle, explaining the process at work, introducing the problem, and concluding with a proposal for change.

You can read more about the social science that supports this sequence in [Order Matters](#).



ChangeLab Solutions

**Framing Tobacco-Related Health Disparities  
Building a Strong Frame**

# An Outline for Framing a Social or Scientific Issue



## 1. Principle

**Lead with an ideal that society should uphold.**

**Tap into a collective concern—ideally, using a tested message that speaks to shared values.**

## 2. Process

**Explain how the issue works.**

**Establish a mechanism or process at play, using explanatory techniques like examples or metaphors.**

## 3. Problem

**Put some tension in the plot.**

**Make social conditions or structures the “bad guys.” Paint these threats as important but not insurmountable**

## 4. Proposal

**Point to solutions.**

**Highlight promising or proven collective approaches to addressing the problem.**

# Example #1: Framing Tobacco-Related Health Disparities



## 1. Principle

### Justice

A just and fair society values every person and their health. Our commitment to justice calls us to address the harmful role of commercial tobacco.

## 2. Process

### Tobacco control

As a nation, we have steadily expanded tobacco protections. We are less exposed to smoke in the air and see fewer ads for deadly tobacco products.

## 3. Problem

### Uneven protection

But these protections, which most Americans can take for granted, are less likely to cover the places where people of color live, work, and learn.

## 4. Proposal

### Address policy gaps

To treat everyone fairly, we must extend tobacco protections to every community, with no exceptions.

# Example #2: Ending State Preemption of Smoke-Free Rules



## 1. Principle

### Justice

A just and fair society ensures that no person—regardless of where they live or how much money they make—is repeatedly exposed to experiences that we know are harmful.

## 2. Process

### Smoke-free protections

Because there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke, many cities and towns have adopted smoke-free policies to protect residents.

## 3. Problem

### Uneven protection

But not everyone is protected. 23 states allow smoking in some workplaces. 8 of the 10 US states with the highest proportion of Black residents have state laws that prevent local communities from setting up stronger local tobacco control rules.

## 4. Proposal

### Return communities' power to protect themselves

So that all Americans can benefit from the protections that most of us take for granted, states should allow communities to create stronger smoke-free air policies.

# Example #3: Smoke-Free Protections in Residences



## 1. Principle

### Justice

A just and fair society values every person and their health. Our commitment to justice calls us to address the harmful role of commercial tobacco.

## 2. Process

### Smoke-free protections

It's especially important to protect children from secondhand smoke. Secondhand smoke can damage virtually every organ in the body—and its effects begin immediately. Over the long term, it can cause serious disease and make other health issues worse.

## 3. Problem

### Uneven protection

Smoke can travel through doors, windows, and air vents. Children who live in apartment complexes and other types of multi-unit housing are more likely to be exposed to secondhand smoke— even if no one in their family smokes indoors.

## 4. Proposal

### Return communities' power to protect themselves

States, cities, communities, and landlords can adopt smoke-free home programs and connect residents to programs that treat nicotine dependence.

# Example #4: Restricting the Sale of Menthol Cigarettes



## 1. Principle

For decades, the tobacco industry has saturated Black neighborhoods and publications with tailored ads that try to make menthol seem like part of a cultural lifestyle.

## 2. Process

The problem is that menthol is particularly dangerous. Menthol has a cooling effect that makes it easier to inhale deeply, leading to a bigger dose of nicotine. This can cause a stronger addiction, making menthols harder to quit.

## 3. Problem

Other flavored cigarettes were banned years ago, but menthol cigarettes—the kind that causes the most harm in Black communities—are still on the shelves.

## 4. Proposal

A national policy is in the works, but it will take time. Communities can begin to protect themselves now by restricting the sale of tobacco products that have any flavor, but especially menthol.

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For more information about framing tobacco as a health equity issue, visit <https://www.changelabsolutions.org/product/framing-tobacco-disparities>



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