

THE WAY FORWARD

A New Narrative for Housing
in Fairfield County



November 2020



Fairfield County's Center for Housing Opportunity (FCCHO)

facilitates the intentional production, preservation, and protection of a full spectrum of housing that fosters communities of opportunity accessible to all Fairfield County residents. Utilizing a collaborative, data-driven, regional approach FCCHO strives to reduce the percentage of cost burdened households in Fairfield County, while expanding and protecting existing affordable residences. FCCHO adopts a collective impact model, which skillfully brings different organizations together to advance social change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FCCHO wishes to thank Dr. Tiffany Manuel and her team at The Case Made for their research and production of the findings of this report, and Melville Charitable Trust for making this work possible.



FCCHO NARRATIVE CHANGE WORKGROUP

Christie Stewart, Director, Fairfield County's Center for Housing Opportunity

Melissa Kaplan-Macey, Vice President, State Programs and Connecticut Director, Regional Plan Association

Lauren Tsuboyama Former Director of Communications, Regional Plan Association

Sean Ghio, Policy Director, Partnership for Strong Communities

Erika Stanley, Manager, Community Capacity Building, Fairfield County's Community Foundation

Stephen Saloom, Director, Advocacy & Capacity Building, Fairfield County's Community Foundation

Jenita Hayes, Training and Equity Manager, Supportive Housing Works

Ian Warburg, Westport Resident and Chair of Save Westport Now

Vanessa Liles, Bridgeport Resident Community Organizer, PT Partners,

Becca Allen, Senior Program Officer, Melville Charitable Trust

Evonne Klein, former Connecticut Department of Housing Commissioner

Dave Goldenberg, Town of Ridgefield Affordable Housing Committee

Kas Tebbetts, Intern, RPA

REPORT DESIGN AND EDITING

Dave Zackin, Graphic Designer, RPA

Mark McNulty, Communications Associate, RPA

FCCHO PARTNERS

FAIRFIELD COUNTY'S COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



As a nonprofit partner and thought leader since 1992, Fairfield County's Community Foundation brings together passionate people and trusted resources to solve our region's challenges through innovative, collaborative solutions.

PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES



Partnership for Strong Communities (PSC) is a statewide nonprofit policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ending homelessness, expanding affordable housing, and building strong communities in Connecticut.

REGIONAL PLAN ASSOCIATION



Regional Plan Association (RPA) is one of America's oldest urban research and advocacy organizations. RPA works to improve the prosperity, infrastructure, sustainability and quality of life of the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut metropolitan region.

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING WORKS



Supportive Housing Works' (SHW) mission is to end homelessness in Fairfield County by advancing a collective impact approach through dedicated staff, committed partners, and effective leadership.

COLLABORATE WITH FCCHO

To become more involved in this effort, visit fccho.org or contact:

Fairfield County's Center for Housing Opportunity

815 Main Street, Bridgeport, CT 06604





*The Way Forward: A New Narrative
for Housing in Fairfield County*

Introduction

Fairfield County is an expensive place to live. The high cost of housing is well known and commonly accepted as the trade off for living in a great place close to New York City with terrific schools, beautiful open spaces and waterfronts, and convenient commuter access to Manhattan.

But the truth is that Fairfield County can be a place that offers all of these things that residents currently value and also provide housing options for people at all levels of income.

But that's not how people think today. Housing affordability is not a commonly shared goal and residential segregation of wealthier white people in the suburbs and lower-income people of color in the cities is commonly accepted as "the way it is." Housing advocates have been fighting the good fight for decades, continuing to wage an uphill battle to create more affordable homes for residents with success in some places and failure in others. But the narrative that affordable housing is good for local communities continues to fall largely on deaf ears.

We must demonstrate that housing opportunity will improve schools, improve access to opportunity, reduce traffic, reduce pollution, make communities more desirable, more economically vibrant, and most importantly more equitable.

Fairfield County's Center for Housing Opportunity (FCCHO) was born out of this frustration and the desire to appreciably move the needle on the creation of more affordable homes in Fairfield County. With a diverse group of cross-sector stakeholders around the table it quickly became clear that in order to build public will for the creation and preservation of equitable housing options for residents of all incomes in Fairfield County, we need a new narrative.



In order to build public will for the creation and preservation of equitable housing options for residents of all incomes in Fairfield County, we need a new narrative.



With support from Melville Charitable Trust, FCCHO partnered with sociologist and national systems change expert Dr. Tiffany Manuel, President and CEO of TheCaseMade, to understand Fairfield County residents' attitudes towards housing affordability and related issues like education and economic development. Over a six-month period, Dr. Manuel and her team conducted a series of "community voice sessions" to engage residents from all walks of life and county geographies. Through this groundbreaking research, Dr. Manuel identified the specific ways we can reshape the discussion around housing opportunity and reframe affordable housing as a critical community asset and investment that benefits everyone.

Dr. Manuel's research shows us that Fairfield County residents value diversity, but are not connecting that value with the issue of housing affordability. They are stressed by the high cost of living, but accept that as the price of entry for living in Fairfield County. They want their communities to be places of opportunity, but largely dismiss the lack of access for low- and middle-income families as a challenge. While Fairfield County residents feel a strong sense of connection to their local communities, this affinity is often weaponized to drive out affordable housing rather than welcome it.

With a new housing narrative, we can offer residents a choice between preserving their community, and *strengthening* it.

In order to afford the high cost of living in Fairfield County, parents work long hours and multiple jobs, which costs them time spent with their families. Talented teachers turn down jobs in our communities because they can't afford to live near the schools where they teach. Households pay more than 30% – and often more than 50% – of their income towards housing, limiting consumer spending and dragging down the local economy. Young people are

leaving Fairfield County because they can't find an affordable place to live in or near their home towns. And seniors wanting to downsize find it impossible to find appropriate housing options in the towns where they've raised their families and lived their lives.

Is this the Fairfield County we want to leave to our children? No – and it doesn't have to be this way. With its bustling main streets, famous beaches and woodland areas, and quick commutes to New York, Fairfield County can and should be an idyllic and affordable place to live. It can become the hotbed of economic opportunity it was a few generations ago, and a national model of diversity and inclusion. The critical change we need to achieve these goals is to embrace housing opportunity as the foundation for thriving communities.

Housing opportunity – a variety of housing choices for people with a variety of incomes and backgrounds, – is a fundamental part of a thriving economy and a healthy community. Advocates know this, but have struggled to effectively communicate it to residents and build the broad-based public support necessary to change the status quo. For decades, we've been unable to convince residents - regardless of their income or housing status – that they have skin in this game.

By demonstrating that housing opportunity is critical to Fairfield County's future well-being, we can motivate residents to welcome new neighbors, and to make room for the diversity they consistently point to as one of Fairfield County's greatest attributes.

To drive meaningful change, advocates must flip the script. Our research shows that when housing opportunity is seen for what is – a benefit that adds value to the community instead of detracting from it – communities are more receptive to it. We must stop telling negative stories and begin telling positive ones.

By deploying new narratives like those outlined in this report, advocates can demonstrate to current residents, particularly residents in wealthier white suburbs where resistance is strongest, that welcoming everyone to Fairfield County regardless of income makes our communities stronger and better places to live.

The messaging strategy and recommendations outlined in this playbook are intended to be a jumping off point. They are only as valuable as what we as advocates are able to do with them.
So let's get to work.



First Things First: We Listened

MORE THAN 150 FAIRFIELD COUNTY RESIDENTS IN THE REGION PARTICIPATED IN OUR COMMUNITY VOICE SESSIONS

Participants were recruited through a professional recruiting firm to ensure diversity along several dimensions.

The project team asked residents questions including: what are your top three concerns you wish policymakers and government would address in FC? What do you value most about living in FC? What would you most like to change about FC?

Focus Group Participants:

- ▶ Ages: 20 to 74
- ▶ Household Income: \$35K to \$250K+
- ▶ Racial/Ethnic Diversity
- ▶ Education: high school to post-grad
- ▶ Occupational mix
- ▶ Mix of renters and owners
- ▶ Mix of progressives and conservatives
- ▶ Mix of couples, singles, families, and single parents
- ▶ Range of housing situations, housing histories, and perspectives
- ▶ Diversity of political affiliation and community involvement
- ▶ All registered voters



What is narrative and why do we need narrative shift?



WE ARE ALL SHAPED BY THE NARRATIVES AROUND US.

Narratives are the retelling of stories that remind us who we are, how we got here, and what needs to be done to shape the future we envision. During a public health crisis that underscores the need for adequate housing options, and amidst renewed calls to eliminate institutional barriers to opportunity for people of color, housing advocates must seize the moment. If we build and collaboratively deploy a successful narrative that aligns housing with identified community values and goals, we can effectively counter the not-in-my-backyard thinking (NIMBY-ism) that remains a significant barrier to the housing opportunity that this moment requires.

Strengthening Our Narratives Through Messaging Research

This is a critical moment for anyone who values housing in Fairfield County. It is a moment where your neighbors are trying to make sense of what's happening around them, to their own prospects for success, and for the success of their community overall.

The pandemic and recession have further exposed economic inequity in our communities and made more visible the struggles of lower-income individuals. The widespread and painful outcry against racial injustice has made racial inequity more and more difficult to ignore. While many people may not see how these issues relate to housing opportunity, you do.

This is an especially important time for people like you who understand the central role that housing plays in Fairfield County's success.

You are being called to be interpreters and guides: to help people connect to this issue, to help them see their stake in advocating for housing opportunity, and to mobilize them to act on the values they hold about the dignity of all people.

This is a moment when our storytelling matters a great deal. In order to bring forward the new champions we need to achieve a more just future, we must communicate powerfully the kind of Fairfield County we are today and the Fairfield County that we want for tomorrow. And we need those new champions to see themselves in our vision of the future and to want to be a part of it.

The messaging research outlined in this playbook is meant to strengthen our narrative storytelling. It will help us connect our vision to the hopes and dreams - and worries - that we know Fairfield County residents have. It will help connect their individual truths to the larger truth about how we all benefit from living in a more just world.



Messaging Strategy

Our Messaging Strategy Must Do At Least Three Things:

1. Understand the People We Are Trying to Mobilize and What Motivates Them to Action

Making the case for housing requires that we have some idea of the beliefs, aspirations, fears, and hopes of the people we are talking to. That's why we've done months of research – talking to people across Fairfield County and hearing from organizations working to advance housing solutions.

Because there are a wide variety of different audiences and organizations working to expand housing in Fairfield County, we've outlined high level, general messages that can be tailored for use in specific narratives to different groups and audiences.

2. Make Clear Messaging Recommendations from the Research

Messaging research allows us to use good social science to connect to different audiences most effectively. It helps us anticipate backfires in how we communicate as well as see new pathways to better practice.

We only win if we are changing people's orientation to the world they are seeing. The research we've conducted in Fairfield County has looked closely at the ways we can effectively do that. Through both quantitative and qualitative methods involving more than 250 people across Fairfield County, we've outlined what we know works. Review the guidance here, use what helps advance your work, and share this research widely with others who are advocating for better housing in Fairfield County.

3. Help People Deploy the Recommendations in Their Own Narratives

Messaging research should never replace your expertise or your truth as a community builder and organizer. Look critically at the messaging advice in this playbook (and in other guides) for tips, tools, and language that can help you tell your story.

The messaging advice in this playbook will give you tools that will make you an even better storyteller – sharing narratives that inspire people to action. Tell your story and let the research we've done help!



Messaging Recommendations:

Making the Case for Housing

Put the “Big Rocks” in First: Trust, Stake, Belonging

- ▶ Craft a case that connects to people’s values and mobilizes them to action.
 - ▶ Center equity as part of every housing conversation.
 - ▶ Help people visualize what housing equity means and make sure that everyone can see themselves in that vision!
1. Position housing as a powerful shaping force that can determine whether Fairfield County communities thrive or merely survive.
 2. Shift Fairfield County residents into investment mode and out of a charity mindset regarding housing solutions. An investment in housing that more people can afford is an investment in OUR future!
 3. Remind people of what they stand to lose if they fail to join the growing movement of people in Fairfield County who are working to redesign our housing system so that it works better for everybody.
 4. Leverage the strong place-based identity that Fairfield County residents have. Remind them of what they love about their communities and tap into their memories of what they’ve already overcome as a community. This is the foundation of a broader appeal for support.
 5. Name the power of this moment and help people embrace the urgency for bold action.
 6. Reframe the conversation away from housing as a commodity. Instead, position Fairfield County as BOTH a great place to live, that’s close to NYC, with good transit and great schools AND a place that provides great housing options for people at all levels of income.
 7. Amplify and reinforce shared values that have a demonstrated ability to powerfully connect people to housing. Start with these three: diversity/smart growth, health/wellbeing, and children’s opportunity.
 8. Elevate support for equity by positioning it as a metric of success and accountability. Tell people that equitable housing outcomes will be used as a sign of our success. Be explicit about the metrics of success, explain how things will get better as a result of our shared sacrifices, and ask them to hold you accountable for the results.
 9. With great care and consideration, attach housing to constructive narratives in other sectors and social movements that hold promise for expanding our coalition.
 10. Tell the “story of us” often. Make everyday Fairfield County residents the heroes of the story and help them connect to their own sense of agency.
 11. Be intentional in sharing the value proposition of housing and community development organizations as having a strong track record of creating/preserving housing as well as giving voice to the concerns, expertise, and resources of the communities they serve.
 12. Use the power of storytelling to carefully navigate around the dominant narratives and negative disruptors. Instead, tell bigger stories that people can (and want to) see themselves in.
 13. Use robust examples of “what’s working but needs more support” as your call to action. Use data to highlight the possibilities for wide-scale improvement, not to remind people of the “housing crisis” they have become so accustomed to hearing about.

Position Housing as A Shaping Force

Position housing as a powerful shaping force that impacts education, healthcare, and economic development outcomes and can determine whether we as a community thrive or merely survive.

Why This Matters

Put housing back in the driver's seat! It is difficult to get people to prioritize housing because they don't see it as a driver of outcomes that matter. Instead, they see jobs, education, and a host of other things as drivers of their success. We must consistently show how housing shapes the quality of our lives. Help residents across Fairfield County see that an investment in housing can be the catalyst for better jobs, talent retention, health, infrastructure, education, and social justice across the region.

Changing the Narrative

DON'T

Don't ignore the fact that Fairfield County residents see housing challenges as a result of negative things happening in other sectors, and not vice versa.

DO

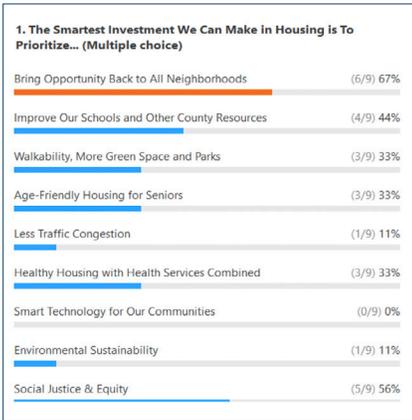
Do position our housing system, and the policies it produces, as a powerful shaping force that impacts education, healthcare, and economic development outcomes and determines whether we thrive or merely survive.

Shift People Into Investment Mode

Shift Fairfield County residents into investment mode and out of a charity mindset regarding housing solutions. An investment in affordable housing is an investment in OUR future!

Why This Matters

The language of "investment" moves people out of a charity mindset. When we "invest," we do so because we expect dividends and other gains to come from those investments. In addition, because of the longer horizon for the return on infrastructure investments, it allows us to push people's expectations about the payoff much farther into the future. That's exactly what housing is -an investment in our community that pays strong yields over the



Fairfield County residents value housing as a means to bring opportunity back to the region.

long-term -strong communities, healthier people, educated workforce, economic development, and much more. Moreover, when we asked people WHY we ought to make smart investments in housing, opportunity was consistently at the top of the list.

Changing the Narrative

DON'T

Don't assume that people's sympathy (or empathy, if you can get it), is enough to garner support for housing policies or to mobilize them to action.

DO

Shift people out of a charity mindset when they think about affordable housing to one of an impact investor. An investment in affordable housing is an investment in OUR future!

Remind People of What They Stand to Lose if They Fail to Support Better Housing

Remind people of what they stand to lose if they fail to join the growing movement of people in Fairfield County who are working to redesign our housing system so that it works better for everybody.

Why This Matters

People are used to thinking about what they might "lose" if we create more affordable housing, but they don't do much thinking about what happens if we don't offer better housing options. If housing is a "predictor" of outcomes, we need to highlight the consequences of ignoring the housing needs of people in our region. Our narrative has to describe the challenges that Fairfield County will face if they fail to support the work to make housing more affordable in Fairfield County.

Changing the Narrative

DON'T

Don't assume that all Fairfield County residents understand what they are losing because we have a housing system that fails to address the needs of so many people across the region.

DO

Counter this assertion by reminding people of what they stand to lose if they fail to join the growing movement of people in Fairfield County who are working to redesign our housing system so that it works better for everybody!

Leverage the Power of a Strong “We”

Leverage the strong place-based identity that Fairfield County residents have. Remind them of what they love about their communities and tap into their memories of what they’ve already overcome to strengthen the communities around them. This is the foundation of a broader appeal for support.

Why This Matters

- ▶ Connect Fairfield County residents to the strong collective identity and sense of pride that they have for their communities. This helps connect them to a bigger sense of “WE” and potentially, to a conversation about how “our” fates are tied together -which can help unite them in purpose.
- ▶ Use the stories you tell as an opportunity to remind people of what they’ve already overcome together. As part of defining this identity, help people connect their neighborhoods/communities to others in the region.
- ▶ Be clear about the opportunities of working together and the perils of a “go it alone approach” with respect to housing.

Changing the Narrative

DON'T

Don't miss the opportunity to leverage the strong place-based identity that Fairfield County residents have and their memories of the collective success they've experienced in shaping the health of the communities around them.

DO

Remind Fairfield County residents of what they love about their communities and uplift their memories of what they've already overcome to strengthen the communities around them.

Name the Power of This Moment

Name the power of this moment and help people embrace the urgency for bold action. Take the time to help people see that we have a unique opportunity right now to improve housing policies to get ahead of current and looming challenges.

Why This Matters

- ▶ Name the moment we are in as soon as possible in the conversation to strengthen and reinforce the sense of urgency. Naming the power of the moment forces people to consider what we need in order to be ready for the big challenges and opportunities confronting us today.
- ▶ Raising the larger adaptive challenges that Fairfield County faces -like COVID-19, racial injustice, and climate change - helps shift people out of inertia and hasten their sense of urgency to act, since the scale of these challenges cannot be ignored.

Changing the Narrative

DON'T

Don't assume that all of Fairfield County's residents understand the power and importance of this moment. Don't assume that they see recent social and economic events as a call to action that centers better housing solutions as a meaningful response.

DO

Name the power of this moment and help people embrace the urgency for bold action. Take the time to help people see this moment in time as a unique opportunity to improve housing policies to get ahead of current and looming challenges.

Reframe the Conversation Away From Housing as a Commodity

Reframe the conversation away from housing as a commodity. Instead, make the case that Fairfield County can BOTH be a great place to live that's close to NYC and has good transit and great schools AND provide great housing options for people at all levels of income.

Why This Matters

Fairfield County residents rationalize the high cost of housing based on its location, amenities, and access to transit. In our community voice sessions, when they thought about the value of those amenities, they assumed away the idea that housing in Fairfield could ever be "affordable." We must complicate that narrative with a "both/and" strategy. Help people understand that we can get value from both having a great place to live *and* making sure that housing is affordable.

Changing the Narrative

DON'T

Don't make "affordable housing" or "affordability" the central theme of the larger message. It reinforces people's instinct to commoditize housing and rationalize the high cost of housing based on what they are "buying" by living in Fairfield.

DO

Reframe the conversation away from housing as a commodity. Instead, make the case that Fairfield County can *both* be a great place to live that's close to NYC and has good transit and great schools *and* provide great housing options for people at all levels of income.

Amplify and Reinforce Shared Values

Amplify and reinforce shared values that have a demonstrated ability to powerfully connect people to housing. Start with these three: (1) diversity/smart growth, (2) health/ wellbeing, and (3) children's opportunity.

Why This Matters

When we connect housing to the aspirations of people in our communities, they are more likely to "lean forward." In our community voice sessions, people told us energetically that they were proud of the diversity of Fairfield County and wanted to grow in a "smart" way. They also underscored the importance of health and wellbeing in relationship to their ability to afford to live in Fairfield County. And they told us that they didn't want to sacrifice their children's education to stay in the neighborhoods and communities they loved. When we help them understand how housing can help deliver on THEIR aspirations, we get a different conversation.

Changing the Narrative

DON'T

Don't miss the opportunity to use values that have a demonstrable ability to connect people to housing issues and can do the heavy lifting of carrying strong housing messages forward.

DO

Amplify and reinforce VALUES that connect people to housing. Be creative in lifting up these values in stories, personal narratives, art, spoken word, and everywhere there is an opportunity to pull people forward on this issue.

Center Equity and System Change

Elevate support for equity by positioning it as a metric of success and accountability. Signal to people that equitable housing outcomes will be used as a sign of our success. Be explicit about the metrics of success, explain how things will get better as a result of our shared sacrifices, and ask them to hold you accountable for the results.

Why This Matters

Acknowledging the extraordinarily exclusionary policies that have worked to the detriment of many groups of people across Fairfield County is an important part of shifting the conversation. The key is to address this quickly and then position efforts to address housing as being intentionally about tackling equity and liberating our communities from perpetual hardship. The narrative has to acknowledge how we arrived here, specifically that many policies and investments of the past have made it impossible for residents to hold on to their homes and the communities they've helped to build.

Changing the Narrative

DON'T

Don't assume that people who value diversity and voice angst about the growing economic and racial divide will readily support the kind of equitable housing policies that make diversity possible.

DO

Center issues of equity in all messaging by positioning it as a metric of success and accountability. Producing equitable housing outcomes is the way we know our systems are working!

Attach Housing to Other Sectors and Broader Social Movements

With great care and consideration, attach housing to constructive narratives in other sectors and social movements that hold promise for expanding our coalition.

Why This Matters

Where applicable, seize the moment to attach housing solutions to messaging already in circulation in the health, racial, and economic justice movements. Those kinds of connections and linkages to other issues, like racial and economic equity, would help us make the case. Telling stories of interdependence is powerful casemaking—when people are reminded consistently of their deep connection to and reliance on others, it helps them see their stake in helping others.

Changing the Narrative

DON'T

Don't assume that a housing-focused message is the only way to bring new champions to housing conversations. Housing messaging that does not speak to the other social movements and issues shaping public discourse at this moment runs the risk of sounding tone deaf.

DO

Connect housing to related narratives in racial justice, health, education, transportation, and climate change, for starters.

Mobilize People by Helping Them Connect to Their Own Sense of Agency

Tell the “story of us” often. Make everyday Fairfield County residents the heroes of the story and help them connect to their own sense of agency.

Why This Matters

Tell the story of us over and over again! It reinforces the asset framing and helps overcome the fatalism that many people bring to housing conversations. Remind people that Fairfield County has been a home for important and historic wins on big social issues, like ending street homelessness among veterans, and addressing gun control in the wake of the Sandy Hook school shooting in Newtown, CT. Remind people that, despite a history of housing injustices, this region has also been a place where many people have been able to build successful lives. Tell stories that remind people of their aspirations to educate their children, find good jobs, enjoy the cultural assets of the region, build wealth, and experience joy.

Changing the Narrative

DON'T

Don't miss the opportunity to powerfully mobilize people to action because they don't see how their actions can meaningfully change the macro trends shaping Fairfield County and our country today.

DO

Tell the “story of us” often, being especially careful to include a wide range of people in Fairfield County who can and want to see themselves included. Make everyday Fairfield County residents the heroes of the story and help them connect to their sense of agency.

Share the Value Proposition of Housing Organizations Working for Change

Be intentional in sharing the value proposition of housing and community development organizations as having a strong track record of creating/preserving housing, as well as giving voice to the concerns, expertise, and resources of the communities they serve.

Why This Matters

Share and highlight the value of organizations working toward housing solutions as well as the ways in which they have helped to improve housing in Fairfield County. People do not trust that larger organizations (employers, government leaders, banks, developers, and others involved in expanding housing) are working to benefit everyday people. Without an intentional effort to position these organizations as true community partners, you won't get the buy-in that you need from broader public audiences.

Changing the Narrative

DON'T

Don't assume that Fairfield County residents trust that your efforts will actually help them. Most don't believe that “affordable housing” will ever benefit them directly.

DO

Take the time to remind people of your track record in advancing equitable housing solutions that work and have benefitted people who look like them.

Navigate the Dominant Narratives and Negative Disruptors

Use the power of storytelling to carefully navigate around the dominant narratives and negative disruptors. Instead, tell bigger stories that people can (and want to) see themselves in!

Why This Matters

There are some dominant narratives that are so counterproductive and disruptive that we need to simply avoid them or pivot around them. In the community voice sessions that we conducted as part of this project, several narratives and negative disruptors emerged consistently that made it more difficult to mobilize residents to action. Some were simply distractions -like taxes and traffic -but they require us to be especially strategic in how we pivot away from them.

Changing the Narrative

DON'T

Don't assume that because the need for affordable housing across Fairfield County is growing, that the *stigma* of "affordable housing" is any less of an issue. Avoid the words and phrases that push people back to their defaults about affordable housing and the people who need it.

DO

Use the power of storytelling to carefully navigate around the dominant narratives and negative disruptors. Instead, tell bigger stories that people can (and want to) see themselves in!

Use what's working to call people to action rather than negative data

Use robust examples of "what's working but needs more support" as your call to action. Use data to highlight the possibilities for wide-scale improvement, not to remind people of the "housing crisis" they have become so accustomed to hearing about.

Why This Matters

To be successful, we must directly counter the level of distrust, cynicism, and apathy that people are experiencing. These are impediments to action and without some intentional messaging to bolster people's belief that systems change is possible, they will not lean in. Take the time to help people see what is working already and use most of your data to remind people that there is the possibility for wide-scale improvement when we work together. Then, ask for their support, reminding them that THEY are the heroes that we've been waiting for!

Changing the Narrative

DON'T

Don't use data as your call to action –especially if that data does more to highlight problems than advance solutions. Avoid using negatively framed data, like the number of people experiencing a “housing crisis” to try to drive urgency.

DO

Use robust examples of “what's working but needs more support and scale” as your call to action. Use data to highlight the possibilities for wide-scale improvement, not to remind people of the housing crisis.





FCCHO

Fairfield County's Center
for Housing Opportunity

We welcome collaborators!

**To become more involved in this effort,
visit fcho.org or contact:**

Fairfield County's Center for Housing Opportunity
815 Main Street, Bridgeport, CT 06604

