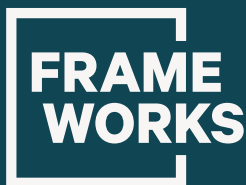


# How to Talk about the Importance of Lived Experience in Solving Homelessness

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# Introduction

There are growing numbers of people experiencing homelessness in the United States, including people who are experiencing it for the first time.<sup>1</sup> People with firsthand experience of homelessness are also increasingly becoming advocates and have important contributions to make to the nonprofit sector. Yet meaningfully including people with lived experience of homelessness in the sector remains a challenge for myriad reasons, including existing public mindsets that can make it difficult to see the expertise that comes from lived experience.<sup>2</sup> People with lived experience of homelessness are often seen through the lens of negative stereotypes and dehumanizing narratives. Negative stereotypes of people experiencing homelessness are not new in American culture, but they remain pervasive today. These stereotypes can impact how people see lived experience of homelessness as something shameful rather than a source of knowledge. In this report, we present recommendations that combat negative stereotypes, present lived experience of homelessness as a form of knowledge, and increase support for including knowledge gained from lived experience of homelessness in decision-making spaces.

New ways to talk about and depict people with lived experience of homelessness are necessary to advance ethical solutions that take into account people's experiences and expertise. This report adds to existing efforts to change communications about the lived experience of homelessness. Similar to ethical storytelling approaches, the research that informs this report focuses on the following:

- **Prioritizing asset-based framing.** Similar to Trabian Shorter's Asset-Framing®,<sup>3</sup> this research emphasizes focusing on the contributions, aspirations, and expertise of individuals rather than the challenges they face. In a similar vein, our approach aims to move away from deficit narratives, which center on problems, and instead highlights the capabilities people can bring to help solve systemic problems.
- **Developing human-centered storytelling.** Consistent with ethical storytelling practices, this research prioritizes humanizing narratives that depict people as agents of change rather than nameless victims or passive recipients of aid. It avoids trauma-centered storytelling, aligning with broader recommendations to frame stories around dignity and resilience.<sup>4</sup>
- **Emphasizing systems thinking.** Both this research and broader ethical storytelling movements advocate for storytelling that situates individual experiences within the context of systemic issues, ensuring that narratives go beyond surface-level explanations.
- **Providing practice guidance for ethical implementation.** Similar to ethical storytelling guides, this research offers actionable recommendations, such as equitable compensation for storytellers and ensuring storytellers have control over their narratives.

There are also notable differences in the way this research approaches strategic communications to more traditional ethical storytelling guidelines. These differences include the following:

- **A focused application on homelessness.** While ethical storytelling frameworks are broadly applicable across various sectors (e.g., poverty, global health, education), this research specifically tailors its findings to the context of homelessness and the lived experience of those affected. It highlights nuances in public mindsets about homelessness, such as *Deservingness* and *Individualism*, which require unique framing strategies not always covered in generic ethical storytelling approaches.
- **Empirical validation.** Unlike many ethical storytelling frameworks that rely on qualitative insights and best practices, this research includes rigorous mixed-methods testing of frames and narratives. It empirically validates which messaging strategies are most effective in shifting public mindsets and increasing support for systemic solutions.
- **Systems-competence framing.** This research introduces a novel systems-competence frame, which explicitly links the expertise of people with lived experience to actionable systemic solutions. This goes beyond ethical storytelling's general focus on humanizing narratives by demonstrating how lived experience translates into practical, impactful knowledge.
- **Action-oriented communications.** The research identifies and prioritizes messaging that emphasizes action over acknowledgment. For instance, captions and narratives focused on how organizations take tangible steps based on the insights of lived experience are more effective than simply stating that input was listened to. This focus on accountability and impact distinguishes these recommendations from more general ethical storytelling frameworks.
- **Rethinking traditional metaphors.** The research tested metaphors like a *Seat at the Table*, which are commonly used in ethical storytelling but were found to be ineffective at shifting public thinking in productive directions. Instead, we recommend other framing strategies—a value and a storytelling frame—that better communicate the active contributions of people with lived experience.

Critically, the framing recommendations in this report support a longer-term shift in the broader nonprofit sector toward more ethical storytelling and a change in the power dynamic between organizations and the people they serve.

From 2022 to 2024, the FrameWorks Institute, in partnership with the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and an advisory panel of advocates in the field who have lived experience of homelessness, conducted rigorous mixed-methods research to develop specific framing strategies to communicate about meaningfully including people with lived experience in nonprofit spaces and in systemic solutions to address homelessness more broadly. A full description of the methods and sample composition are available in Appendix A at the end of this report. This report describes the strategic framing recommendations we identified based on qualitative and quantitative research conducted with a diverse sample of the public and those working in the nonprofit sector.

The recommendations in this report can help nonprofit advocates and communicators speak to the field and the public about the importance of meaningfully including people with lived experience of homelessness in their work. An overarching recommendation is to prioritize taking direction from people with lived experience when portraying them and their experiences. The four strategic communications recommendations described below are based on our empirical research. The first two recommendations focus on how to talk about meaningfully including people with lived experience in solutions to address homelessness, and the last two focus on best practices for using images of people with lived experience of homelessness.

## How to Talk about the Knowledge Gained from the Lived Experience of Homelessness

### **RECOMMENDATION #1**

Use the value of *Future Prosperity* to explain how people with lived experience of homelessness have valuable knowledge to contribute.

### **RECOMMENDATION #2**

Harness the power of storytelling to tell stories about systems that highlight the competence of people with lived experience.

## How to Use Images When Talking about People with Lived Experience of Homelessness

### **RECOMMENDATION #3**

Always pair images with captions or quotes that present context and reference agency of people with lived experience of homelessness.

### **RECOMMENDATION #4**

Use captions or quotes that emphasize the concrete steps taken in response to guidance from people with lived experience.

These framing strategies can help communicators and advocates affirm the importance of lived experience within the field, and help shift mindsets so more people with lived experience are more meaningfully included in decision-making. These recommendations provide actionable steps that communicators and advocates can make to shift public mindsets, which can improve advocacy outcomes and sector-specific innovations in homelessness advocacy.

# How to Use This Strategic Brief

The recommendations in this brief can be used by communicators, advocates, and practitioners working on homelessness and related issues in the following ways:

1. **For people with lived experience of homelessness**, this guide provides strategies to advocate for lived experience as a form of knowledge that should be included in decision-making spaces. The framing recommendations can be used by people with lived experience to advocate for meaningful and ethical inclusion in nonprofit work to address homelessness, including through the use of storytelling and images that portray people with lived experience as expert advocates for change.
2. **For nonprofit organizations** in the field, this guide provides strategies for talking about how they work with people with lived experience, including talking about the value of lived experience; framing stories about advocates; and using images in ways that support this.

## HOW THESE RECOMMENDATIONS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO SYSTEMIC CHANGE

- **Advance ethical storytelling.** This research provides a next-generation approach to ethical storytelling by grounding recommendations in data and testing messaging strategies specifically for homelessness advocacy. It refines broad principles into targeted, evidence-based practices.
- **Focus on actionable change.** The emphasis on action-driven narratives ensures that storytelling translates into meaningful outcomes. This aligns with growing public skepticism of performative inclusion and increases the credibility of organizations that adopt these practices.
- **Shift public mindsets.** The findings offer new ways to disrupt deeply entrenched stereotypes and harmful narratives about homelessness. By emphasizing competence and the value of lived experience to change systems, the research shifts the focus from pity and blame to respect and collaboration.
- **Improve advocacy outcomes.** Tested messaging strategies show measurable improvements in public support for funding, policy change, and inclusion of lived experience in decision-making. This makes the findings particularly actionable for nonprofits and advocates looking to drive change.
- **Enable sector-specific innovations.** By focusing on the unique challenges of homelessness advocacy, the research provides insights that are directly applicable to organizations working in this space while also offering transferable lessons for other fields.

## HOW DOES THIS RESEARCH RELATE TO ETHICAL STORYTELLING?

Ethical storytelling refers to a broad movement across the nonprofit sector to tell stories that are guided by the storyteller rather than the goals of the organization.<sup>5</sup> Too often in the field of homelessness prevention and services, people are asked to tell stories that promote the organization's work in ways that are predetermined by the organization. This dynamic makes it appear that the story is being told from a firsthand perspective, while behind the scenes the storyteller has been constrained by the needs of the organization. This is not restricted to a few organizations or fields, but is rather common across the nonprofit sector.<sup>6</sup> As a result, there is a history of nonprofit organizations communicating in ways that can inadvertently perpetuate harmful stereotypes and reinforce status quo power structures. The movement toward ethical storytelling aims to disrupt this pattern in the nonprofit sector by prioritizing the autonomy and safety of the storyteller over the end goal of the organization.

There are multiple approaches to ethical storytelling that this research contributes to and expands upon.<sup>7</sup> For example, the *Better Conversations about Ethical Storytelling* guide highlights the risks of oversimplified narratives, which can flatten experiences and perpetuate harmful power dynamics. Their recommendations include diversifying the stories shared, applying asset-framing, and fostering sustainable relationships with storytellers. Trabian Shorters' Asset-Framing® approach further reinforces the importance of emphasizing the aspirations and contributions of communities rather than their hardships.

In this report, we expand the ethical storytelling approach by focusing on the knowledge and expertise of the storyteller, thereby transferring more power to them. The framing recommendations described below that focus on storytelling, using images, and using a value frame contribute to conversations about how to avoid oversimplified narratives and apply asset-based approaches to strategic communications. These recommendations emphasize the need to develop communications that highlight the agency and expertise of people with lived experience,<sup>8</sup> as well as the need to clearly communicate about the structural causes of homelessness and the structural solutions necessary to address the issue.<sup>9</sup> In this way, this report provides ways to meaningfully incorporate ethical storytelling practices into long-term narrative shifts toward the recognition of lived experience as a form of knowledge and expertise.

# Insights from the Advisory Panel

This project was conducted in collaboration with an advisory panel of professionals working in the field of homelessness prevention and advocacy who have personally experienced homelessness. Advisory panel members participated in one-on-one interviews and group meetings to give feedback and provide their insights. Their contributions (described in full in Appendix A) have been invaluable to this project.

## PROFILES OF THE ADVISORY PANEL

The Advisory Panel consisted of eight members, some of whom have chosen not to be publicly listed here. We are grateful for all their contributions throughout the course of the project, whether listed here or behind the scenes. The named Advisory Panel members include:

- **Jason Brown.** Jason is the Vice Board Chair of The Center, an organization dedicated to ending homelessness and isolation in Hollywood and the greater Los Angeles area. There he oversees operations, finance, and program development while engaging in stakeholder recruitment and board growth. He is also a member of the Housing and Homelessness Leadership Network Program at Coro Southern California and serves as Security Manager for WET Design.
- **Sage Johnson.** Sage Johnson is the Southern California Co-Chair for the BHHI Lived Expertise Advisory Board. She was born and raised in Los Angeles, CA and is currently a Senior Facilitator at EverExcel Consulting, a national consulting firm dedicated to working with institutions and organizations across multiple sectors to improve outcomes for marginalized populations. Sage's work and passion has been centered on tackling homelessness for Transitional-Aged Youth (TAY) in LA County, particularly Black and Queer youth.
- **Keris Jän Myrick.** Keris is a leader, strategist, and advocate known for her transformative work in mental health, social justice, and equity. With lived experience at the heart of her advocacy, Keris leverages her personal journey to inform her efforts in reshaping systems and policies that impact marginalized communities. She is the developer and host of the podcast "Unapologetically Black Unicorns" focusing on mental health, race equity and lived experience and the founder and developer of CADRE Policy Academy housed at Howard University Department of Psychiatry.
- **Shawn Pleasants.** Shawn is a former banker and entrepreneur with an economics degree from Yale, who lived unhoused in Los Angeles with his husband for over 10 years. After becoming housed in 2020 he became a homelessness systems change advocate and uses his personal experience with HIV research, substance use disorder, mental health and homelessness to improve the intersectional systems that provide services to those in need. He has served on several boards and committees, including the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority's Lived Experience Advisory Board (co-chair).



The recommendations in this project are aimed at creating a set of communication strategies that more effectively center the needs of people with lived experience of homelessness, especially those who work in the field of homelessness prevention and advocacy.

The panel identified the following challenges in communicating about homelessness:

**1. Housing insecurity is a structural problem that affects a wide range of people in different ways.**

Advisory panel members named poverty and the criminalization of poverty as the main drivers of homelessness in the United States. People may experience poverty due to a range of systemic issues, including the legacy of systemic racism. Gentrification and redlining coalesce to create hostile housing environments with limited options for poor people, people of color, and people with disabilities. In addition to financial barriers to attaining housing, people may experience other situations that make their previous homes unsafe (for example, domestic violence). Within the LGBTQIA community, it is also not uncommon for individuals to be disowned by their families and be forced to leave their homes.

**2. People experiencing homelessness are portrayed in dehumanizing ways in American culture and discourse.** This has deep historical roots in American society, starting from “vagrancy” laws in the 19th century that were used to disproportionately target and criminalize recently freed formerly enslaved people.<sup>10</sup> Advisory panel members noted that these portrayals have negative effects not only on media discourse but also on the mental and physical health of people experiencing homelessness. This dehumanizing discourse can be seen in existing public mindsets around homelessness that we have identified in this project and elsewhere.<sup>11,12</sup>

**3. The dehumanizing discourse around people experiencing homelessness is used to justify State and interpersonal violence committed against them.** Advisory panel members discussed their observations and experience with violence from the State (for example, through police raids and hostile architecture).<sup>13</sup> Hostile architecture refers to urban design strategies that are intended to discourage behaviors such as sleeping in public spaces. They have also seen incidents of interpersonal hate crimes by people who may think of unhoused people as disposable. This observation is supported by research showing severe violence committed against people experiencing homelessness.<sup>14</sup> From 2020 to 2023, the National Coalition for the Homeless reported 97 acts of violence against people experiencing homelessness—48 percent of these violent acts were lethal. Of the nonlethal attacks, 54.8% were beatings, and over one-third (35%) of those beatings were committed by members of law enforcement.

**4. People with lived experience are frequently asked to recount traumatic stories to promote the work of nonprofit organizations.** Panelists pointed out that this practice contributes to further dehumanization of people with lived experience of homelessness. Advocates in the broader field of ethical storytelling have also expressed this concern with regard to the broader nonprofit sector, not only in the field of homelessness.<sup>15</sup>

Advisory panel members pointed out that there are a number of immediate changes the nonprofit sector could make to meaningfully include people with lived experience of homelessness in their work:

1. **Humanize portrayals** of people with lived experience of homelessness by talking about homelessness as a condition, not an identity; telling well-rounded stories; and giving storytellers agency over their stories.
2. **Create sustainable, long-term engagements** with people with lived experience to avoid tokenization of advocates. Advocates experience tokenization when they are invited to give feedback or guidance, but then are not given the space or power to adequately give that feedback. It can seem like the purpose of these engagements is to check a box rather than engage with the ideas and knowledge of people with lived experience.
3. **Show respect for advocates** by creating the material conditions for sustained engagements. For example, organizations could create full-time positions that require lived experience; pay advocates fairly; and divest from harmful norms of traditional “professionalism” that can exclude people who are new to the nonprofit environment and create unnecessary barriers to collaboration.<sup>i</sup> Several panel members noted that some advocates are more frequently picked than others to represent the voice of lived experience because they use nonprofit jargon or carry themselves in ways that are considered more “professional” than other advocates.

The strategic framing recommendations described below respond to these core ideas. Changing the way we communicate about the expertise that people with lived experience of homelessness have can lead to broader shifts in public thinking about people who have experienced homelessness and build support for systemic solutions to end homelessness.

## EXISTING MINDSETS ABOUT HOMELESSNESS AND LIVED EXPERIENCE

A number of mindsets shape how members of the American public think about homelessness and lived experience. These mindsets represent both challenges and opportunities for communicating about people with lived experience of homelessness and the need to meaningfully include them in solutions to end homelessness.

Cultural mindsets are deep, assumed patterns of thinking that shape how we understand the world and how we make decisions. Certain mindsets can lead people to think about current social structures as normal and acceptable, while others encourage constructive critique and can create support for positive change. Multiple mindsets are present within a culture, so individuals have a variety of mindsets available to them. How and when they use these mindsets can vary depending on context. Additionally, communicators can aim to cue certain mindsets that are more helpful for messaging and avoid cueing mindsets that are harmful. Mindsets may be strengthened by what people see or hear, so it is important for communicators to understand mindsets and how to make the most of them for messaging.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>i</sup> At an October 2024 convening of the Homelessness Initiative in Southern California, advocates also emphasized the need for meaningful inclusion, guidance, and leadership opportunities for people with lived experience of homelessness. They highlighted the presence of many leaders with such experience and called for a culture that values and openly celebrates this knowledge as an asset rather than something to conceal.

# Challenges in Public Thinking

These are common public mindsets that pose challenges to our goals:

- **The *Individualism* mindset.** One of the most common mindsets in American culture is an assumption that life outcomes result from individual choices. This mindset can make it hard for people to see how systems can shape one's circumstances. There are also related mindsets that stem from individualism when people think about homelessness:
  - **The *Rational Actor* mindset.** When thinking this way, people reason that those experiencing homelessness have consciously chosen to live this way because they do not want to conform to social norms, responsibilities, and expectations. When thinking this way, people often reason that people experiencing homelessness are responsible and even to blame for their circumstances.
  - **The *Self-Makingness* mindset.** When members of the public think with this mindset, they reason that individuals make their own fate and determine their own destinies. In this thinking, hard work leads to success, and people who are facing challenges must not be working hard enough. When thinking in this way, people attribute success or failure to individual agency. This mindset can lead people to think in terms of *deservingness*, categorizing people as either deserving or undeserving of support. In this view, people experiencing homelessness are categorized as deserving if they are seen to experience homelessness by no fault of their own, if they are grateful for the help they are given, and/or if they accept the terms of the help they are given as set by the helper. On the other hand, people experiencing homelessness are categorized as undeserving if they are perceived as somehow responsible for their state, are not grateful, and/or try to set the terms of the help they are offered. This mindset makes it hard for people to see the agency of people experiencing homelessness as well as the broader systems that have led to their experience with homelessness and what should be done to change those systems.
- **The *Vicious Cycle* mindset.** The public assumes that people who experience homelessness are trapped in a downward spiral from which they are unlikely to recover. This mindset assumes that certain stereotypical problems, such as behavioral health challenges, lead to homelessness. These problems are thought to be exacerbated by living on the streets, making it difficult for people to escape homelessness. While this mindset allows room for some thinking about structural issues that can contribute to an individual continuously experiencing homelessness, it often leads to fatalism about the possibility of addressing or ending homelessness on a broad scale. This can make it difficult for people to see what needs to be done to solve homelessness and how people with lived experience can meaningfully be part of systemic solutions.
- **The *System Is Rigged* mindset applied to nonprofits.** In this common mindset that is becoming stronger in public thinking, people assume that “the system” is rigged by the powerful few to benefit themselves at the expense of “regular” people. The thinking here is flexible—who is rigging the system, in what ways, and against whom can vary widely. While this thinking can

be productively leveraged,<sup>17</sup> when applied to nonprofits, this thinking is largely unproductive.<sup>18</sup> There is an assumption that nonprofits are run like for-profit corporations, with the organization's leaders getting rich at the expense of the people who donate and the people who are supposed to be helped by their services. This thinking leads people to be suspicious and skeptical of the motivations of nonprofit organizations, which can make it hard for them to see the important role nonprofits play in providing essential services to people experiencing homelessness, as well as how people with lived experience have valuable contributions to make to nonprofit organizations' work.

## Opportunities in Public Thinking

The public mindsets below are more productive and present opportunities for framing strategies:

- **The *We're All Human* mindset.** Research participants often emphasized that people experiencing homelessness “are human too” while saying that the prevailing assumption tends to disregard their humanity. This thinking is productive because it directly pushes back against dehumanizing narratives about people experiencing homelessness. However, without an understanding of meaningful solutions to address homelessness, this thinking can lead to pity for those experiencing homelessness rather than a sense of collective concern or support for systemic solutions to address the injustice of homelessness.
- **The *Government as Protector* mindset.** According to this mindset, the government has a responsibility to protect members of our society, which includes people experiencing homelessness. When thinking this way, people reason that homelessness is a failure of society and the government must play a role to change things. This mindset can help people see the importance of broad, structural policy changes. However, the mechanisms of how the government should address homelessness are vague in this thinking. This thinking needs to be expanded to give people a better understanding of what exactly the government should do to address homelessness and how people with lived experience of homelessness should be involved in broader systemic change efforts.
- **The *Universal Social Forces* mindset.** In this thinking, people assume that homelessness is driven by external economic conditions and forces beyond an individual's control. People talk about these economic forces as largely mysterious powers and understand them in fuzzy terms. The mindset leads people to reason that economic trends shift suddenly and affect people in unpredictable ways. In contrast to the more individualistic mindsets, when people employ this thinking, they reason that homelessness is not an individual choice but something that happens to people due to broader social forces. If leveraged and expanded upon, this thinking could be used to build understanding of and support for systemic change. This mindset was also found in previous FrameWorks reports on talking about homelessness and poverty in the United Kingdom.<sup>19</sup>

- **The *Lived Experience Has Value* mindset.** When thinking with this mindset, lived experience is considered more valuable than academic study and education on a subject. Someone who has extensively studied a topic but lacks firsthand experience is seen as missing an essential understanding that education alone cannot provide. This mindset can be leveraged to help the public recognize the importance of lived experience of homelessness. However, when taken to its extreme, this mindset can lead people to privilege lived experience over all other forms of knowledge.<sup>20</sup> To avoid cueing this extreme version, it's important to talk about lived experience as one of many types of expertise that should be consulted in problem-solving.
- **Critique of a depersonalizing portrayal of people experiencing homelessness.** In this portrayal, people experiencing homelessness are depicted as nameless and faceless members of a group rather than unique individuals. Participants brought up the ways the media portrays people experiencing homelessness in this way, which they critiqued for failing to recognize people's unique identities. It is notable that participants pointed this out as a problem. However, by focusing on the individual, the critique of this portrayal still doesn't recognize the role of systems in perpetuating and exacerbating homelessness.
- **Critique of a dehumanizing portrayal of people experiencing homelessness.** In this harmful portrayal, people experiencing homelessness are objectified and portrayed as less than human. For example, they are spoken about as "burdens" to society or as objects to be "moved." This mindset mostly came up through critiques of it. Participants discussed ways the media or other people dehumanize people experiencing homelessness, but they were quick to critique this way of thinking as problematic. While this harmful portrayal undoubtedly represents a challenge for communicators, the public's recognition of it as a problem is something that could be built on and expanded to deepen people's understanding of people with lived experience as having agency, knowledge, and expertise.

# Recommendations

The following recommendations offer new ways of communicating about meaningfully including people with lived experience of homelessness in the nonprofit sector's work. Taken together, these recommendations offer strategic ways of using storytelling, a value, and images to shift thinking in productive directions and build support for systemic changes to address homelessness. The framing strategies described in these recommendations can be used by those working in the nonprofit sector, including advocates with lived experience of homelessness.

All the recommendations come from research that was designed in collaboration with the advisory panel. While each framing recommendation is designed to shift people's thinking in distinct ways, in our research, all the framing strategies described here shifted thinking for participants across the ideological spectrum and for participants with experience of homelessness as well as those without experience of homelessness.

When using these strategic recommendations, it's important to center the experiences and contributions of people with lived experience of homelessness. This means consistently taking direction from people with lived experience when portraying them and their experiences. In particular, the following steps should be taken when using the strategic recommendations in this report:

- Obtain prior informed consent to use people's likeness and words, and obtain ongoing consent throughout the process of working on strategic communications with people with lived experience.
- Take direction from the person whose story is being told, especially in terms of what to focus on and what to leave out.
- Be mindful of power dynamics in collaborations with people with lived experience of homelessness.

## RECOMMENDATION #1

### Use the value of *Future Prosperity* to explain how people with lived experience of homelessness have valuable knowledge to contribute.

Lead with the value of *Future Prosperity* when explaining how people with lived experience of homelessness can (and do) uniquely contribute to solutions in the field of homelessness prevention and advocacy. *Future Prosperity* refers to the idea that as a society we should value all forms of knowledge to build a prosperous future for us all. It is crucial that this value is paired with a specific explanation of how lived experience adds to the organization's practice. For example, describe in

detail the benefits of incorporating knowledge gained from lived experience into an organization's mission, and connect this explanation to the idea that valuing all forms of knowledge helps us build a prosperous future for everyone.

## What This Looks Like

### Example 1:

At our core, we believe in the power of collective action to shape a future where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. Future prosperity depends on our ability to come together, drawing on diverse forms of knowledge to tackle the challenges we face. By consulting not just academic studies and policy frameworks but also the lived experiences of those directly impacted, we lay the foundation for solutions that are both innovative and deeply effective.

### Example 2:

As a society, we are committed to solving our problems and building a more prosperous future for us all. To effectively address issues like homelessness and create a better future, we need to use all types of knowledge. This includes the knowledge of local lawmakers, nonprofit organizations, and those who have experienced homelessness.

People who have experienced homelessness have firsthand knowledge that allows them to see where resources are limited and support services are lacking, as well as which services are helping. Their practical knowledge is unique and valuable because they're the only ones who truly understand what it's like to be homeless. If we want a more prosperous future, we need to embrace all forms of knowledge. By valuing the firsthand knowledge of people who have experienced homelessness, we can create solutions that effectively address homelessness and build a promising future for us all.

## Why This Works

Values-based frames tap into people's shared commitments and aspirations to make a case for why people should care about a particular issue and work to address it. Values can be particularly effective in building a sense of collective responsibility and collective efficacy that, together, we can solve societal problems. They can also be helpful to build support for specific policies. In our research, the value of *Future Prosperity*, when paired with an explanation of how lived experience of homelessness is a form of expertise, helped build understanding that people with lived experience of homelessness can lead decision-making about solutions and that lived experience of homelessness is a form of expertise. The *Future Prosperity* value also helped increase support for systemic changes to the nonprofit sector to include people with lived experience in decision-making spaces. Moreover, the value expanded understanding of the government's responsibility in including people with lived experience when developing policies to address homelessness. This is likely because the *Future Prosperity* value builds on the existing mindset that our government and society are responsible for solving issues of homelessness. Beginning a communication with *Future Prosperity* cues the idea that we can all work together to solve homelessness for a positive shared fate.



It's important to pair the *Future Prosperity* value with an explanation of why the knowledge gained from lived experience is a critical part of that solution-building process. In our research, we found that pairing the *Future Prosperity* value with an explanation was more effective at shifting people's thinking than using the value on its own. This is because, while people can recognize lived experience as a way to gain knowledge and expertise (as seen in the *Valuing Lived Experience* mindset), there is a gap in public understanding about what this knowledge is and how it can be uniquely valuable to create and implement effective solutions to address homelessness. Combining an explanation of the kind of knowledge people with experience of homelessness have with the *Future Prosperity* value helps connect the dots to build an understanding of *how* the experience of homelessness gives someone unique knowledge and how incorporating this knowledge is an essential piece of crafting effective solutions to address homelessness.

## RECOMMENDATION #2

# Harness the power of storytelling to tell stories about systems that highlight the competence of people with lived experience.

Telling stories is common among advocates and communicators working on homelessness and related issues, and the way we tell stories matters. Even in a personal story, everyone makes framing choices as they decide what to include, what to leave out, and how to tell the story. It is important that storytellers have ownership of their own stories. This recommendation is not meant to override the choices of the storyteller but, rather, to offer a tested framing strategy that can be considered in the framing choices a storyteller can make.

When talking about homelessness, it is easy for some people to default to individualistic mindsets. To combat this, it is critical that we tell systems stories. Systems stories situate individuals in a broader context and focus on shared themes rather than focusing only on that person's experience. When a person's story is contextualized, it becomes easier for people to see the structural forces that act on their lives, so it is also easier to tell stories about how they gained knowledge of systems while experiencing homelessness. Stories of how people with lived experience have contributed to organizations can be highlighted to show their competence. However, these should also be placed in context so it is clear that the person is not particularly exceptional but that the knowledge gained by anyone who has experienced homelessness will be valuable in creating solutions. This can help to avoid tokenizing individuals or separating people into categories of who deserves to contribute and who does not. Ethical storytelling guides suggest making space for a wide variety of stories.<sup>21</sup> A systems story that centers on the competence of people with lived experience can be used to showcase an organization's work without triggering individualistic thinking, tokenizing individuals' experiences, or resorting to stories centered around traumatic experiences.



## What This Looks Like

The key elements of systems stories that highlight the competence of people with lived experience of homelessness are as follows:

- 1. Focus on systems by positioning individual experiences in context.** Even in a story about an individual, focus on the systemic factors that a person encounters in their experience of homelessness as well as the systemic supports that can help get people out of homelessness. Do not frame the individual in the story as somehow *more* capable than others experiencing homelessness. The point is to frame homelessness as a social problem caused by unjust systemic factors rather than as an individual problem.
- 2. Frame homelessness as a temporary condition, not an identity.** For example, rather than saying “homeless people,” we use “people experiencing homelessness” to highlight that it is an event in a person’s life, not a fixed state that defines their life.
- 3. Explain how lived experience gives people a deeper understanding of the issue, which is a valuable contribution to the nonprofit sector.** When sharing stories that aim to highlight lived experience, explain the specific ways a person or people gained knowledge of the systems that exacerbate homelessness and how they now apply this knowledge. For example, talk about how people with lived experience have contributed to the work of a nonprofit organization through their knowledge of systems.
- 4. Connect the knowledge of people with lived experience to systemic solutions.** Talk about how this knowledge allows people with lived experience to see what needs to change, and note the role that people with lived experience can play in contributing to those solutions.

### Example 1:

“My name is Michael, and a few years ago an injury forced me to take time off of work. At the same time my rent increased, and my medical bills started piling up. As a result, I lost my home. But soon after becoming homeless, I found an organization that helped me quickly find safe and stable housing and paired me with a case manager who directed me to resources and services to help with tasks like finding a job and negotiating a reduction to my medical bills. Their support also kept me out of the elements and provided me a secure place to store my personal belongings. Organizations like this exist to support me and others like me. And with their support, I was able to focus on my health and get back to work.”

“My personal experience with homelessness gave me firsthand knowledge of the laws, policies, and systems that are currently in place to address homelessness and how they function in real-life situations. Having navigated these systems myself, I see the barriers that exist—like where resources are limited and support services are lacking, and this makes me an important advocate for effective solutions that can make a real difference. Today I work as an advisor for the organization that helped me when I was without housing. There, I use my firsthand knowledge to lead efforts to end homelessness.”

### **Example 2:**

Like other families impacted by homelessness, Michelle and Derrick Jones have an intimate understanding of its harmful effects on children's development, adult relationships, and community stability. They also know firsthand that preventive measures—such as access to mental health services, which Michelle has used on her path to stability, and job training programs like the one Derrick recently enrolled in—can reduce trauma and improve outcomes. As we address the housing needs of everyone in our community, the insights gained through direct experience and lived expertise must guide the way.

### **Why This Works**

When members of the public think about homelessness, they often employ the individualistic idea that personal work ethic is the main reason people experience homelessness, which can easily lead to thinking about who is deserving or undeserving of support. Systems stories push back on the widely held assumption that individual choices are the primary cause of life outcomes. By placing stories in context, people can more easily see the mechanisms of the structures acting on people's lives. In our research, the systems story that highlighted the competence of people with lived experience helped overcome individualistic thinking about homelessness and helped expand the understanding of homelessness as a structural problem. It also made people more likely to donate to organizations working on homelessness and increased support for programs that seek guidance from people with lived experience of homelessness. Moreover, this type of story avoids focusing on the trauma of experiencing homelessness and instead focuses on how people with lived experience are capable of effectively working toward solutions in partnership with nonprofit organizations.

Additionally, the systems-competence story made participants more likely to perceive people experiencing homelessness as “warm.” The perception of warmth is an important factor in how people perceive and evaluate social groups they are not a part of. Past literature suggests that when a group is considered high in warmth and competence, they are perceived as capable and effective at achieving their goals, solving problems, and performing tasks.<sup>22</sup> The stereotype content model<sup>23</sup> suggests that we judge groups based on how warm and friendly we think they are, as well as how competent or capable we believe they are. These perceptions can influence people's attitudes, behaviors, and interactions with people experiencing homelessness.

## WHY INDIVIDUAL GRATITUDE STORIES SHOULD BE AVOIDED

It is common for organizations working on homelessness and related issues to ask people with lived experience to share stories that focus on the difficulty of their experiences and how an organization helped them through those experiences. Telling stories about trauma can lead to storytellers feeling tokenized or, at worst, retraumatize the storyteller. We tested this form of storytelling, called individual gratitude stories, which are focused on an individual's experience of hardship and their gratitude for organizations that supported them in that time. In our research, the individual gratitude story made participants more likely to think that people experiencing homelessness should be grateful for any help they receive. This *deservingness* thinking unproductively categorizes people into those who “deserve” help—in this view, people who are grateful for any help they receive—and those who do not, which in this view would be people who are ungrateful or do not express their gratitude. This is likely because the individual gratitude story reinforces a familiar hierarchy, where people experiencing homelessness are positioned as helpless and nonprofit organizations that provide services are positioned as saviors. This positioning makes it difficult for people to see how homelessness is a problem that requires broad structural solutions (within which nonprofits play an important role). Conversely, stories that talk about systems and emphasize the competence of people with lived experience of homelessness do not trigger *deservingness* thinking and instead build understanding of homelessness as a structural problem and people with lived experience as having valuable knowledge to contribute to solutions for homelessness.

## How to Use Images: Foregrounding Context and Concrete Change

There is substantial existing guidance on how to use images in communicating about homelessness.<sup>24,25,26</sup> The recommendations that follow expand upon this previous work by focusing on how to connect images with framed communications that emphasize the contributions, guidance, and leadership of people with lived experience of homelessness.

### RECOMMENDATION #3

## Always pair images with captions or quotes that present context and reference agency of people with lived experience of homelessness.

When using images, pair them with captions or quotes that give context, such as who the person is, how they are connected to the work or the organization, and the type of guidance or leadership they have provided. Use authentic photos of people with lived experience in their element, such as at work at the organization or leading a community meeting.

### What This Looks Like

#### Example 1:

Maria Lopez, a former participant and now a housing advocate with our organization, leads workshops to help others transition to secure and stable housing. Her lived experience inspires practical solutions and real hope for our community.

#### Example 2:

Jonathan Green serves as a leader of our mentorship program, offering guidance to teens experiencing homelessness. His leadership has informed the development and improvement of the mentoring program for the past five years.

### Why This Works

When people see images of people experiencing or who have experienced homelessness without any context, they often resort to stereotypes or pity, as well as defaulting to individualistic thinking about people with lived experience of homelessness and why they are experiencing it. However, adding context about the person or people with lived experience of homelessness—including who they are, what they have experienced, and how they are using their knowledge to contribute to solutions to end homelessness—helps people recognize the agency of people with lived experience of homelessness and the structures that have affected them. Adding context can also help members of the public more easily see people with lived experience of homelessness as real, authentic people who have experiences outside the stereotypical ones.

Authenticity is an important consideration when using images in context. In our research, participants were often skeptical of photos that seemed inauthentic or staged, even when they were paired with additional context. Therefore, it's important to use images and context that express the authentic experiences of people with lived experience of homelessness and situate their knowledge in a larger structural context.

## IMAGES OF GROUPS VERSUS IMAGES OF INDIVIDUALS

The importance of providing context to images is apparent in our research on images of individuals. In the focus groups, when participants were shown pictures of individuals without accompanying context, they imagined the individuals giving personal testimonials of overcoming homelessness. Participants often brought up words like “gratitude” and “humility” when talking about the individuals in these images, indicating that these types of images may cue *deservingness* thinking when they lack context.

On the other hand, images of groups did not cue thinking about gratitude or *deservingness*. However, without context, images of groups were difficult to connect to the issue of homelessness, and participants often described them as generic “town hall” meetings. While both types of images need additional context to help expand people’s understanding of broader structures and the role of people with lived experience of homelessness, it’s especially important to provide context to images of individuals to overcome *deservingness* thinking that is often associated with these images.

## RECOMMENDATION #4

### Use captions or quotes that emphasize the concrete steps taken in response to guidance from people with lived experience.

Pair images with captions or quotes that emphasize concrete actions organizations are taking based on the expertise and guidance of people with lived experience. Focus on the broader structural changes that the organization’s work is contributing to through specific actions and how these actions are guided by the firsthand knowledge of people with lived experience of homelessness.

### What This Looks Like

#### Example 1:

Guided by those who know this issue firsthand, we are expanding access to housing, mental health support, and job training—turning insights from lived experience into lasting solutions.

#### Example 2:

“I advised the organization to survey folks who use our services so we could improve the types of services we provide. The organization took my advice and is now creating a plan to implement changes based on the survey results.”

## Why This Works

Captions and quotes that emphasize action based on the guidance of people with lived experience of homelessness focus on how the problem of homelessness can be solved with the meaningful inclusion of people with lived experience. This framing can help overcome people's skepticism about nonprofits effecting change and their fatalism about the possibility of ending homelessness. Emphasizing action can also expand support for organizations meaningfully including people with lived experience in their work. In the focus groups, the framed caption that focused on an organization “taking action” based on the guidance of people with lived experience of homelessness helped overcome participants' skepticism of nonprofits and helped them envision the ways in which an organization can meaningfully include the contributions of people with lived experience in its work. This was the case when the action caption was paired with both individual and group images. In contrast, a caption that described an organization “listening” to people with lived experience did not overcome participants' skepticism, and instead led people to reason that the organization was being insincere in its efforts. The action caption—paired with a variety of images—is therefore more effective at building support for an organization's work and understanding of the important contributions that people with lived experience make to that work.

### WHY THE *SEAT AT THE TABLE* METAPHOR DOESN'T WORK

One metaphor that has been used in the field refers to inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness as giving them *A Seat at the Table*. In our research, we found that both this metaphor and a similar metaphor about *Building a New Table* did not shift thinking productively or unproductively. That is, these frames had no effect on participants' support for including people with lived experience in decision-making spaces. While these metaphors didn't backfire, they also failed to build or expand understanding of the importance of including people with lived experience of homelessness in the nonprofit sector. This could be related to people's skepticism about nonprofits.<sup>27</sup> Instead of using these ineffective metaphors, talk about how organizations are taking action based on the contributions of people with lived experience, which will help overcome people's skepticism and build support for change.

# Conclusion

People with lived experience of homelessness play a crucial role in the movement to end homelessness, offering practical insights that can improve services, guide advocacy, and foster innovative prevention strategies. Their firsthand understanding of the challenges and stigma associated with homelessness allows them to resonate deeply with clients and provide valuable, experience-based critiques of existing systems. However, despite their contributions, many face challenges in being taken seriously and securing full-time roles, and are sometimes subjected to tokenistic participation. Prevailing individualistic mindsets that blame individuals for their circumstances can affect how decision-makers value their input, further hindering their inclusion. Changing this thinking requires concerted strategic communications efforts.

The framing strategies described in this report can help communicators and advocates build an understanding of the important role that people with lived experience should play in solutions to address homelessness and increase support for meaningful systemic change. These strategies complement and build on the foundational work of ethical storytelling by offering a focused, evidence-based approach tailored to the field of homelessness. The innovations described here—such as the empirically tested *Future Prosperity* value, systems-competence storytelling frame, action-oriented messaging, and the strategic use of images with context—push the boundaries of what ethical storytelling can achieve. By demonstrating the power of lived experience as a form of expertise, these strategic recommendations can not only reshape narratives but also help to strengthen advocacy efforts and accelerate systemic change.

# Appendix A: Research Methods and Samples

To arrive at the recommendations in this brief, we applied Strategic Frame Analysis®—an approach to communications research and practice that yields strategies for shifting the discourse around social issues. This approach has been shown to increase understanding of, and engagement in, conversations about social issues.

This work builds on earlier research we conducted that involved interviews with members of the public and experts and advocates working to: (1) expand understanding of the structural causes of homelessness, and (2) emphasize the importance of including people with lived experience of homelessness when creating solutions to end it. These findings are described in a separate brief and methods appendix.

Below, we describe the research we conducted in which we designed and tested frames to address the challenges and leverage the opportunities in public thinking about systemic causes of homelessness and the expertise of people who have experienced it. These frames were tested in 2024 and refined using two methods: peer discourse sessions (PDS), a type of focus group, and survey experiments with a nationally representative sample. In total, 4,730 people from across the United States were included in this research.

## Advisory Panel Engagements

To understand the challenges in communicating about the lived experience of homelessness with the public and in the nonprofit sector, we consulted with an advisory panel. The advisory panel was composed of professionals working in the field of homelessness prevention and advocacy who have personally experienced homelessness. Some members of the advisory panel will remain anonymous, but the members who elected to be named are listed at the beginning of the report. Guided by both their own lived experience of homelessness and their experience working in the field, panel members provided suggestions that improved the work at multiple points. Specifically, advisory panel members contributed to the following:

- Eight members of the panel had one-hour semi-structured interviews with FrameWorks researchers from February 2023 to March 2023 to discuss the challenges of communicating about the lived experience of homelessness both with the public and in the professional field of homelessness prevention and services. These interviews were analyzed by FrameWorks researchers to produce the core ideas of the project. The core ideas directly informed the goals of the project. Advisory panel members were presented with a draft of the core ideas to provide verbal or written feedback, and their feedback was incorporated into the final version.



- Four two-hour group meetings were held between April 2023 and September 2024 to discuss aspects of the research, including the following:
  - Refining the core ideas to guide the project.
  - Aligning the communications tasks so that FrameWorks' goals matched the research concerns of the panel.
  - Reactions to proposed framing strategies and new suggestions for framing strategies. For example, a panel member suggested the *Build a New Table* metaphor, and multiple members highlighted the importance of asset framing.
  - Selecting images to test for the focus groups. For example, panel members highlighted the importance of showing people with lived experience authentically engaged in work for the cause.
  - Testing the selected frames for their usability in the field. Panel members suggested changes that affected how researchers wrote the instructions for using frames, and helped researchers decide which value frame to use, as two frames were potentially helpful.

Finally, panel members were given a draft of this strategic brief to give feedback on the final work. Although there was some attrition from the panel due to scheduling conflicts, half of the members were able to advise throughout the project. The panel's contributions were integral to the direction of the project.

## Exploratory Peer Discourse Sessions

To identify the cultural mindsets that shape how people think about homelessness and the importance of lived experience, FrameWorks conducted four exploratory peer-discourse sessions (PDS), a type of focus group, with 24 participants over Zoom in July 2023. Participants were recruited from the general public and selected based on their self-identification with key demographics, including age, gender, race/ethnicity, household income, education level, political party identification, and lived experience of housing insecurity. Potential participants who worked or volunteered in the field of social work or in fields related to housing insecurity, or who held degrees in social work, were excluded from the sessions. In addition, researchers conducted two PDS sessions with 15 participants specifically recruited because they worked in the nonprofit sector on issues of homelessness, housing, or poverty. These two samples of participants allowed us to identify mindsets that were held by the general public and practitioners, as well as to identify any differences in the salience of particular mindsets between these two groups.

## Frame Design

To identify effective ways to communicate about homelessness and the expertise of people with lived experience, FrameWorks researchers worked with the advisory panel to identify a set of communication tasks that the frames needed to address:

- **Task 1.** Build public understanding of why it is important to include people with lived experience of homelessness in creating solutions to homelessness.
- **Task 2.** Expand public understanding of the structural causes (and injustice) of homelessness.
- **Task 3.** Build a sense of collective responsibility about meaningfully including people with lived experience in decision-making spaces in the nonprofit sector.
- **Task 4.** Build support for systemic changes to the nonprofit sector to more meaningfully include people with lived experience of homelessness in decision-making about issues related to homelessness.

FrameWorks researchers then brainstormed potential reframing strategies that might accomplish one or more of the communication tasks. Ideas considered included metaphors, values, and issue frames, among others. After generating a list of ideas to test, FrameWorks gathered feedback from the advisory panel to ensure the frames were both apt and potentially usable by the field. Based on this feedback, researchers refined a set of frames for empirical testing.

## Experimental Surveys

After developing the communications tasks and brainstorming frames to test, FrameWorks researchers refined the frames to bring forward for testing in the survey experiment. Two online experimental surveys involving a total sample of 6,510 adults in the United States (Wave 1: N = 2,252; Wave 2: N = 2,478) were conducted between February and June 2024 to test the effectiveness of frames on shifting public understanding, attitudes, and support of systemic changes to the nonprofit sector to more meaningfully include people with lived experience of homelessness. Target quotas were set according to national benchmarks for age, sex, race/ethnicity, household income, education level, and political party affiliation. See Table 1 for more information about the sample composition for each experiment. Data was not weighted.

**Table 1<sup>ii</sup> : Participant Demographics**

| Demographic Variable | Wave 1 Frequency | Wave 1 Percent | Wave 2 Frequency | Wave 2 Percent |
|----------------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| <b>Age</b>           |                  |                |                  |                |
| 18–24                | 171              | 8%             | 225              | 9%             |
| 25–34                | 369              | 16%            | 497              | 20%            |
| 35–44                | 452              | 20%            | 451              | 18%            |
| 45–59                | 577              | 26%            | 592              | 24%            |
| 60+                  | 683              | 30%            | 713              | 29%            |

<sup>ii</sup> Percentages listed may equal greater than 100% due to rounding.

| Demographic Variable                  | Wave 1 Frequency | Wave 1 Percent | Wave 2 Frequency | Wave 2 Percent |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| <b>Sex</b>                            |                  |                |                  |                |
| Male                                  | 1,114            | 49%            | 1,225            | 49%            |
| Female                                | 1,136            | 50%            | 1,250            | 50%            |
| Nonbinary/Other                       | 2                | <1%            | 3                | <0%            |
| <b>Ethnicity</b>                      |                  |                |                  |                |
| Caucasian/White (non-Hispanic/Latino) | 1,326            | 59%            | 1,421            | 57%            |
| Hispanic or Latino                    | 346              | 15%            | 416              | 17%            |
| Black/African American                | 336              | 15%            | 377              | 15%            |
| Asian                                 | 145              | 6%             | 153              | 6%             |
| American Indian/Alaska Native         | 27               | 1%             | 26               | 1%             |
| Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander            | 5                | <1%            | 6                | <1%            |
| Other/biracial or multiracial         | 67               | 3%             | 76               | 3%             |
| <b>Income</b>                         |                  |                |                  |                |
| \$0–\$24,999                          | 415              | 18%            | 454              | 18%            |
| \$25,000–\$49,999                     | 465              | 21%            | 576              | 23%            |
| \$50,000–\$99,999                     | 726              | 32%            | 762              | 31%            |
| \$100,000–\$149,000                   | 396              | 18%            | 405              | 16%            |
| \$150,000+                            | 250              | 11%            | 281              | 11%            |
| <b>Education</b>                      |                  |                |                  |                |
| High school diploma or less           | 697              | 31%            | 780              | 31%            |
| Some college or associate degree      | 676              | 30%            | 717              | 29%            |
| Bachelor's degree                     | 526              | 23%            | 619              | 25%            |
| Graduate/professional degree          | 353              | 16%            | 362              | 15%            |
| <b>Party Leaning</b>                  |                  |                |                  |                |
| Closer to Republican Party            | 879              | 39%            | 976              | 39%            |
| Close to Democrat Party               | 1,133            | 50%            | 1,240            | 50%            |
| Neither                               | 240              | 11%            | 262              | 11%            |

| Demographic Variable              | Wave 1 Frequency | Wave 1 Percent | Wave 2 Frequency | Wave 2 Percent |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| <b>Marital Status</b>             |                  |                |                  |                |
| Single                            | 786              | 35%            | 959              | 39%            |
| Married                           | 1,051            | 47%            | 1,067            | 43%            |
| Married but separated             | 51               | 2%             | 46               | 2%             |
| Divorced                          | 252              | 11%            | 266              | 11%            |
| Other                             | 112              | 5%             | 140              | 6%             |
| <b>Region</b>                     |                  |                |                  |                |
| Northeast                         | 408              | 18%            | 460              | 19%            |
| Midwest                           | 484              | 21%            | 483              | 19%            |
| South                             | 847              | 38%            | 1,039            | 42%            |
| West                              | 513              | 23%            | 496              | 20%            |
| <b>Job Working at a Nonprofit</b> |                  |                |                  |                |
| Yes                               | 330              | 15%            | 336              | 14%            |
| No                                | 1,922            | 85%            | 2,142            | 86%            |
| <b>Experienced Homelessness</b>   |                  |                |                  |                |
| Yes                               | 828              | 37%            | 915              | 37%            |
| No                                | 1,369            | 61%            | 1,506            | 61%            |
| Prefer not to say                 | 55               | 2%             | 57               | 2%             |

Participant recruitment and survey hosting was completed by Dynata. Participants were recruited from some combination of the following sources: proprietary loyalty panels, open invitation, or integrated channels that recruit from partnerships with external sources, such as publishers or social networks. All participants opted-in to complete the survey. Participants with Dynata earn points for completing surveys, which they can then exchange for various rewards. These rewards vary by panel and recruitment method but may include things such as airline miles or gift cards.

Participants with Dynata are required to verify their identity at multiple points during survey enrollment and routing. Dynata uses various methods, such as third-party validation and digital fingerprinting, to detect fraud, identify bots, and monitor and detect suspicious activity from participants.

Participants were not allowed to complete the survey more than once. Participants who did not fully complete the survey were removed from the data and were not paid. In addition, participant data was removed if they completed the survey within one-third of the median survey time, if they straightlined, incorrectly answered more than one of the four quality check questions, or provided nonsensical responses to the open-ended questions included in the survey.

After providing consent to participate, participants were randomly assigned to one of several experimental conditions. All frame treatments focused on systemic causes of homelessness and the expertise of people who have experienced it. All tested frames can be found in Appendix B.

Participants assigned to an experimental condition were asked to read a short message, which they were required to view for at least 30 seconds, before answering a series of survey questions. After completing approximately half of the survey questions, participants were reexposed to the experimental condition. Once 20 seconds had passed, participants were able to resume the survey. Survey questions were designed to measure specific outcomes of interest. Each battery consisted of multiple questions and were primarily measured using Likert-type items with five- or seven-point response scales.

Prior to any inferential analysis, we conducted a series of randomization checks. Chi-square analyses indicated that all target demographics were evenly distributed across conditions. We also performed a series of factor analyses to assess the psychometric properties of our scales. For scales that had not been previously tested, we conducted exploratory factor analyses (EFA) to establish their psychometric robustness. Items with rotated factor loadings below  $|.50|$  were dropped from each battery. For scales that had been previously tested, we conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to test the expected dimensionality of our outcome scales. Survey items were specified to load onto their intended factors, with correlations among factors estimated freely using the marker method approach. We used maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors (MLR) to account for potential deviations from normality and model misspecifications. For model fit evaluation, we adopted an inclusive approach that considered multiple fit indices. Recognizing that chi-square is overly sensitive to sample size and minor model misspecifications, we used three approximate fit indices: the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA),<sup>28</sup> with thresholds of  $< .050$  for close fit and  $< .080$  for reasonable fit; the Comparative Fit Index (CFI);<sup>29</sup> and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), with thresholds of  $> .900$  for acceptable fit and  $> .950$  for excellent fit.

Once finalized, Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was used to assess internal consistency among the items in each battery. Given that there are various heuristics for determining acceptable internal consistency, we determined that batteries with internal consistency scores approaching .60 or above would be considered acceptable. After assessing internal consistency, items within each battery were combined into composite scores that indicated participants' average ratings of the attitudes or stereotypes measured by each battery. Final survey items from the experiments can be found in Appendix B.

After conducting the preliminary analyses described above, we used multiple regression analysis to determine whether there were significant differences on the outcomes between each of the experimental frame conditions and the control condition. A threshold of  $p < .05$  was used to determine whether the experimental frame conditions had any significant effects. Significant differences were understood as evidence that a term influenced a particular outcome (for example, collective efficacy). The following example illustrates how regression results were interpreted to inform the strategic guide. The table provides the coefficient for the control group on expertise as the best way to solve homelessness outcome as well as the coefficient for the *Future Prosperity + explanation* condition expertise as the best way to solve homelessness. The coefficient of 62.57 indicates that, when placed on a scale from 0 to 100, participants in the control condition scored an

average of 62.57 on expertise as the best way to solve homelessness. The coefficient of 6.71 indicates that participants in the *Future Prosperity + explanation* condition scored an average of 69.28 (62.57 + 6.71) on expertise as the best way to solve homelessness. The p-value of < .05 indicates that the coefficient for the *Future Prosperity + explanation* condition is significantly different—in this case, significantly higher—than the coefficient of the control condition.

**Table 2: Expertise as the Best Way to Solve Homelessness**

| Condition                              | Coefficient | p-value |
|--|-------------|---------|
| Control                                | 62.57       | .001    |
| <i>Future Prosperity + Explanation</i> | 6.71        | <.001   |

As with all research, it is important to remember that results are based on a sample of the population, not the entire population. As such, all results are subject to margins of error.

## Frame-Testing PDS

After an analysis of both waves of the survey experiment, FrameWorks researchers conducted six two-hour-long PDS sessions with 36 members of the public over Zoom in May 2024. Participants were selected based on their self-identification with key demographics, including income, race/ethnicity, political views, gender, and whether they had ever experienced housing insecurity. People who work or volunteer in the fields of social work or areas related to housing insecurity, or who hold degrees in social work, were excluded from the sessions.

These two-hour-long sessions included a variety of discussion prompts and activities designed to evaluate how the frames were taken up in social context and their usability during conversations with peers. Some of the activities were also designed to gauge how participants perceived images in the context of a discussion about lived experience of homelessness and when paired with certain frames.

Participants were exposed to four sets of images containing four images each that presented diverse people either by themselves or in various group configurations. FrameWorks also tested three variations of a *mental health issue* frame, three variations of a *youth* issue frame, a *listening* frame, and an *action* frame. The tested frames are listed in Appendix B.

## Usability Trials

After the survey and PDS, two usability trials were conducted with people who work in the nonprofit sector to further refine the frames and ensure their usability for the field. In both sessions, participants were presented with exercises in which they were asked to use the frames. One session consisted of three participants who work in the nonprofit sector. The second group consisted of four members of the advisory panel. Both groups were asked to create a story based on a list of factors we included in a systems-competence story, then asked to compare those created stories with a version of the systems-competence story. They were also asked to compare two value and explanation combinations. Analysis of the discussions and exercises were used to refine the framing recommendations based on their perceived usability in the field.

# Appendix B: Tested Framing Strategies

## Survey Experiment: Wave 1

### Values

#### Common Sense

As a society, we believe in using common sense to solve our problems. But right now, we're trying to solve homelessness without listening to people who have experienced it, and that just doesn't make sense. If we want to address the root causes of homelessness and create effective solutions to end it, we need to listen to people who have direct experience with it. They have a deep understanding of the issues that cause and prolong homelessness, and it just makes sense to include them when creating solutions to address it.

We believe in using common sense to solve our problems. To create effective solutions to end homelessness, it just makes sense to take direction from the people who have experienced it.

#### Expertise

As a society, we believe in getting guidance from experts to solve our problems. But right now, we're trying to solve homelessness without listening to the real experts—people who have experienced it. If we want to address the root causes of homelessness and create effective solutions to end it, we need to listen to the expertise of people who have direct experience with it. They are experts in understanding the issues that cause and prolong homelessness, and they know what's needed to address it.

We believe that expert guidance can help us solve our problems. To create effective solutions to end homelessness, we must value the experience of those who have experienced it.

#### Dignity

As a society, we believe in treating people with dignity. But right now, we are trying to solve homelessness without considering the lived experiences of people who have experienced it. If we want to address the root causes of homelessness and create effective solutions to end it, we need to respect and listen to the people who have direct experience with it. They have a deep understanding of the issues that cause and prolong homelessness and know what's needed to address it.

As a society, we believe in treating each other with dignity. To create effective solutions to end homelessness, we must recognize our shared humanity and respect the voices of people who have experienced it.

## Metaphors

### Missing Chairs at the Table

Ending homelessness requires everyone to have a seat at the problem-solving table. But currently, the table only has enough chairs to accommodate a select few. To create effective solutions for addressing the root causes of homelessness—like poverty, low wages, and rising housing costs—we need to add more chairs to the table specifically for people who have experienced homelessness themselves. They have a deep understanding of the issues that cause and prolong homelessness and know best what's needed to address it. If we want to end homelessness, people with lived experience must have seats at the table.

### Build a New Table

Ending homelessness requires people who have experienced it to sit at the head of the problem-solving table. But right now, the table is too small and there isn't room for people who have experienced homelessness to sit at the head. To create effective solutions for addressing the root causes of homelessness—like poverty, low wages, and rising housing costs—we need to build a larger table that allows people who have experienced homelessness to take on leadership roles from the head of the table. They have a deep understanding of the issues that cause and prolong homelessness and know best what's needed to address it. If we want to end homelessness, we need to build a bigger problem-solving table with space at the head of the table for people with lived experience.

## Stories

### Systems Narrative (gratitude)

Organizations that provide support for people who are experiencing homelessness often work to help them find housing, secure benefits, and get back on their feet. Below, Michael, a man who previously experienced homelessness, tells his story and expresses gratitude, explaining how the support he received from one of these organizations helped him quickly find stable housing.

My name is Michael and a few years ago, an injury forced me to take time off of work. At the same time, my rent increased, and I became overwhelmed with medical bills. As a result, I lost my home. But soon after, I was put in touch with a generous nonprofit organization that helped me quickly find safe and stable housing. I was grateful to stay out of the elements and have a secure place to store my personal belongings, all of which helped me maintain my health and keep my job. And with generous support from the nonprofit, I was able to negotiate a reduction to my medical bills.

Thanks to the support I received, today, I'm thriving in my home, my job, and my life. I am very grateful for the help I was given from the nonprofit.

### Systems Narrative (advice)

Organizations that provide support for people who are experiencing homelessness often work to help them find housing, secure benefits, and get back on their feet. Below, Michael, a man who



previously experienced homelessness, tells his story, explaining how the support he received from one of these organizations helped him quickly find stable housing. Today, he uses his personal experience to provide valuable guidance to nonprofit organizations that work to end homelessness.

My name is Michael and a few years ago, an injury forced me to take time off of work. At the same time, my rent increased, and I became overwhelmed with medical bills. As a result, I lost my home. But soon after, I was put in touch with a nonprofit organization that helped me quickly find safe and stable housing. This kept me out of the elements and gave me a secure place to store my personal belongings, all of which helped me maintain my health and keep my job. And with the support of the nonprofit, I was able to negotiate a reduction to my medical bills. When I was homeless, I felt isolated and unsure of what supports were available. Today, I use this experience to advise nonprofits on creating programs that assign case managers to people experiencing homelessness so that they have a supportive relationship with someone who can direct them to the resources they need.

Because of the support I received when I was homeless, I'm thriving in my home, my job, and my life. And today, I am able to provide advice that helps nonprofits find effective solutions to end homelessness.

### **Systems Narrative (leadership)**

Organizations that provide support for people who are experiencing homelessness often work to help them find housing, secure benefits, and get back on their feet. Below, Michael, a man who previously experienced homelessness, tells his story, explaining how the support he received from one of these organizations helped him quickly find stable housing. Today, he relies on his personal experience with homelessness as the assistant director for a nonprofit organization committed to ending homelessness.

My name is Michael and a few years ago, an injury forced me to take time off of work. At the same time, my rent increased, and I became overwhelmed with medical bills. As a result, I lost my home. But soon after, I was put in touch with a nonprofit organization that helped me quickly find safe and stable housing. This kept me out of the elements and gave me a secure place to store my personal belongings, all of which helped me maintain my health and keep my job. And with the support of the nonprofit, I was able to negotiate a reduction to my medical bills. When I was homeless, I felt isolated and unsure of what supports were available. Now, I am the assistant director for the nonprofit that helped me when I was homeless. I use my firsthand experience to lead our new support program, which assigns case managers to people experiencing homelessness so that they have a supportive relationship with someone who can direct them to the resources they need.

Because of the support I received when I was homeless, I am thriving in my home, my life, and my new job, where I lead efforts to end homelessness.

# Wave 2

## Stories

### Individual Cause of Homelessness + Gratitude Base

#### *Formerly Homeless Man Grateful for Local Housing Support*

My name is Michael and a few years ago, I fell into the wrong crowd. At the same time, I made some poor choices that left me without a job and unable to pay my rent. As a result, I lost my home. But soon after becoming homeless, I was very fortunate to be put in touch with a generous organization that helped me quickly find safe and stable housing and paired me with a case manager who directed me to resources and services to help with tasks like finding a job and organizing my finances. I am forever grateful for their support, which kept me out of the elements and provided me a secure place to store my personal belongings. And with their support, I was able to find a new job and get back on the right track

### Systemic Cause of Homelessness + Gratitude Base

#### *Formerly Homeless Man Grateful for Local Housing Support*

My name is Michael and a few years ago, an injury forced me to take time off of work. At the same time, my rent increased, and my medical bills started piling up. As a result, I lost my home. But soon after becoming homeless, I was very fortunate to be put in touch with a generous organization that helped me quickly find safe and stable housing and paired me with a case manager who directed me to resources and services to help with tasks like finding a job and negotiating a reduction to my medical bills. Their support also kept me out of the elements and provided me a secure place to store my personal belongings. I am forever grateful that an organization like this exists to support me and others like me. And with their generous support, I was able to focus on my health and get back to work.

### Individual Cause of Homelessness + Competence

#### *Formerly Homeless Man Now Advises the Charity That Helped Him Find Housing*

My name is Michael and a few years ago, I fell into the wrong crowd. At the same time, I made some poor choices that left me without a job and unable to pay my rent. As a result, I lost my home. But soon after becoming homeless, I found an organization that helped me quickly find safe and stable housing and paired me with a case manager who directed me to resources and services to help with tasks like finding a job and organizing my finances. Their support also kept me out of the elements and provided me a secure place to store my personal belongings. And with their support, I was able to find a new job and get back on the right track.

My personal experience with homelessness means that I can relate to people currently experiencing homelessness because I've been there myself, and I understand the struggles and frustrations. Having experienced homelessness myself, I can identify which resources and support services are actually helpful and which ones can hinder progress and make things more difficult.

And this makes me an important advocate for effective solutions that can make a real difference. Today, I work as an advisor for the organization that helped me when I was homeless. There, I use my firsthand knowledge to lead efforts to end homelessness.

### **Systemic Cause of Homelessness + Competence**

#### ***Formerly Homeless Man Now Advises the Charity That Helped Him Find Housing***

My name is Michael and a few years ago, an injury forced me to take time off of work. At the same time, my rent increased, and my medical bills started piling up. As a result, I lost my home. But soon after becoming homeless, I found an organization that helped me quickly find safe and stable housing and paired me with a case manager who directed me to resources and services to help with tasks like finding a job and negotiating a reduction to my medical bills. Their support also kept me out of the elements and provided me a secure place to store my personal belongings. Organizations like this exist to support me and others like me. And with their support, I was able to focus on my health and get back to work.

My personal experience with homelessness gave me firsthand knowledge of the laws, policies, and systems that are currently in place to address homelessness and how they function in real-life situations. Having navigated these systems myself, I see the barriers that exist—like where resources are limited and support services are lacking—and this makes me an important advocate for effective solutions that can make a real difference. Today, I work as an advisor for the organization that helped me when I was homeless. There, I use my firsthand knowledge to lead efforts to end homelessness.

### **Systemic Cause of Homelessness + Gratitude + Competence**

#### ***Formerly Homeless Man Now Advises the Charity That Helped Him Find Housing***

My name is Michael and a few years ago, an injury forced me to take time off of work. At the same time, my rent increased, and my medical bills started piling up. As a result, I lost my home. But soon after becoming homeless, I was very fortunate to find a generous organization that helped me quickly find safe and stable housing and paired me with a case manager who directed me to resources and services to help with tasks like finding a job and negotiating a reduction to my medical bills. Their support also kept me out of the elements and provided me a secure place to store my personal belongings. I am forever grateful that an organization like this exists to support me and others like me. And with their generous support, I was able to focus on my health and get back to work.

My personal experience with homelessness gave me firsthand knowledge of the laws, policies, and systems that are currently in place to address homelessness and how they function in real-life situations. Having navigated these systems myself, I see the barriers that exist—like where resources are limited and support services are lacking—and this makes me an important advocate for effective solutions that can make a real difference. Today, I am grateful to work as an advisor for the organization that helped me when I was homeless. There, I use my firsthand knowledge to lead efforts to end homelessness.

## Values + explanatory frames

### Base Explanatory Frame

#### ***We Need to Use All Types of Knowledge if We Want to Address Homelessness***

To effectively address homelessness, we need to use all types of knowledge. For instance, politicians and local lawmakers contribute knowledge about laws and policies shaping homelessness.

Nonprofit charities provide knowledge about what's happening in the community. And, those who have experienced homelessness have practical knowledge about the realities of homelessness and the stigma that comes with it.

People who have experienced homelessness have firsthand knowledge that allows them to see where resources are limited and support services are lacking. Plus, they can identify which support services are actually helpful, versus those that hinder progress and make things more difficult. And, their practical knowledge is unique and valuable because they're the only ones who truly understand what it's like to be homeless. But right now, we're not considering this type of knowledge when creating solutions to end homelessness.

If we truly want to address homelessness, we need to embrace all forms of knowledge. By valuing the firsthand knowledge of people who have experienced homelessness, we can create solutions that effectively address homelessness.

### Future Prosperity + Explanation

#### ***We Need to Use All Types of Knowledge if We Want to Address Homelessness and Create a Prosperous Future***

As a society, we are committed to solving our problems and building a more prosperous future for us all. To effectively address issues like homelessness and create a better future, we need to use all types of knowledge. Politicians and local lawmakers contribute knowledge about laws and policies shaping homelessness. Nonprofit charities provide knowledge about what's happening in the community. And, those who have experienced homelessness have practical knowledge about the realities of homelessness and the stigma that comes with it.

To make sure everyone has a more prosperous future, we need to recognize the valuable and unique knowledge that people who have been homeless have to offer. People who have experienced homelessness have firsthand knowledge that allows them to see where resources are limited and support services are lacking. Plus, they can identify which support services are actually helpful, versus those that hinder progress and make things more difficult. And, their practical knowledge is unique and valuable because they're the only ones who truly understand what it's like to be homeless. Right now, we're not considering this type of knowledge when creating solutions to end homelessness, and it's keeping us from building a better future.

If we want a more prosperous future, we need to embrace all forms of knowledge. By valuing the firsthand knowledge of people who have experienced homelessness, we can create solutions that effectively address homelessness and build a promising future for us all.

## **Innovation + Explanation**

### ***We Need to Use All Types of Knowledge if We Want Innovative Solutions to Address Homelessness***

As a society, we believe in innovation and using new approaches to solve our problems. If we want to innovate and solve issues like homelessness, we need to use all types of knowledge. Politicians and local lawmakers contribute knowledge about laws and policies shaping homelessness. Nonprofit charities provide knowledge about what's happening in the community. And, those who have experienced homelessness have practical knowledge about the realities of homelessness and the stigma that comes with it.

To take a new and improved approach at addressing homelessness, we need to recognize the valuable and unique knowledge that people who have been homeless have to offer. People who have experienced homelessness have firsthand knowledge that allows them to see where resources are limited and support services are lacking. Plus, they can identify which support services are actually helpful, versus those that hinder progress and make things more difficult. And, their practical knowledge is unique and valuable because they're the only ones who truly understand what it's like to be homeless. Right now, we're not considering this type of knowledge when creating solutions to end homelessness, and it's limiting our ability to innovate and solve our problems.

If we truly believe in fresh approaches to solving our problems, we need to embrace all forms of knowledge. By valuing the firsthand knowledge of people who have experienced homelessness, we can create innovative solutions that effectively address homelessness.

## **Fairness + Explanation**

### ***We Need to Use All Types of Knowledge if We Want to Fairly Address Homelessness and Create a More Just Society***

As a society, we believe in solving our problems while being fair and just. If we want to be fair and promote justice while solving issues like homelessness, we need to use all types of knowledge. Politicians and local lawmakers contribute knowledge about laws and policies shaping homelessness. Nonprofit charities provide knowledge about what's happening in the community. And, those who have experienced homelessness have practical knowledge about the realities of homelessness and the stigma that comes with it.

To promote fairness and solve our problems, we need to recognize the valuable and unique knowledge that people who have been homeless have to offer. People who have experienced homelessness have firsthand knowledge that allows them to see where resources are limited and support services are lacking. Plus, they can identify which support services are actually helpful, versus those that hinder progress and make things more difficult. And, their practical knowledge is unique and valuable because they're the only ones who truly understand what it's like to be homeless. Right now, we're not considering this type of knowledge when creating solutions to end homelessness, and it's not fair.

If we truly want to promote fairness while solving our problems, we need to embrace all forms of knowledge. By valuing the firsthand knowledge of people who have experienced homelessness, we can create solutions that effectively address homelessness and create a more just society.

## **Common Sense + Explanation**

### ***It's Common Sense to Use All Types of Knowledge When Addressing Homelessness***

As a society, we believe in using common sense to solve our problems. But right now, we're trying to solve issues like homelessness without using all types of knowledge, and that doesn't make sense. Politicians and local lawmakers contribute knowledge about laws and policies shaping homelessness. Nonprofit charities provide knowledge about what's happening in the community. And, those who have experienced homelessness have practical knowledge about the realities of homelessness and the stigma that comes with it.

If we really want to solve homelessness, it just makes sense to recognize the valuable and unique knowledge that people who have been homeless offer. People who have experienced homelessness have firsthand knowledge that allows them to see where resources are limited and support services are lacking. Plus, they can identify which support services are actually helpful, versus those that hinder progress and make things more difficult. And, their practical knowledge is unique and valuable because they're the only ones who truly understand what it's like to be homeless. Right now, we're not considering this type of knowledge when creating solutions to end homelessness, and it doesn't make sense.

If we truly believe in using common sense to solve our problems, we need to embrace all forms of knowledge. By valuing the firsthand knowledge of people who have experienced homelessness, we can create solutions that effectively address homelessness and make sense.



# Frame-Testing PDS

## Images Tested

### Set 1: Images sourced from [Pexels](#)



Photo by: [fauxels](#)



Photo by: [Henri Mathieu-Saint-Laurent](#)



Photo by: [Dani Hart](#)

### Set 2: Images sourced from [Pexels](#)



Photo by: [fauxels](#)



Photo by: [Tima Miroshnichenko](#)



Photo by: [Tima Miroshnichenko](#)

**Set 3: Images sourced from the [Centre for Homelessness Impact](#)**



*Photos by: Jeff Hubbard*

**Set 4: Images sourced from the [Centre for Homelessness Impact](#)**



*Photos by: Jeff Hubbard*



## Image quotations: Issue Frames

### Mental Health

**Advice:** “My advice: more mental health services in homelessness interventions. Mental health workers provide us with needed support, offering more than therapy—they give a sense of visibility and voice, which is vital for recovery and reintegration. Invest in these services; they’re a lifeline and a step toward societal healing.”

**Gratitude:** “Thanks to this organization, I found the mental health support I desperately needed. Their commitment to my wellbeing has not only helped me face my daily challenges but has given me hope and strength for a better future. I am deeply grateful for their dedication to making a difference in our lives.”

**Action:** “Listening sessions with people who have experienced homelessness are essential. They ensure that the mental health services provided truly meet our needs. This approach not only enhances the effectiveness of these mental health programs but also dignifies our experiences.”

### Youth

**Advice:** “My advice: Young people experiencing homelessness need youth-friendly services for trauma, education support, and life skills. This gives us a sense of visibility and voice, which is vital for recovery and integration. Invest in these services for youth; they will help us not just survive on the streets, but thrive in life.”

**Gratitude:** “Thanks to this organization, young people in our community found the support they desperately needed. Their commitment to youth wellbeing has given me hope for a better future. I am deeply grateful for their dedication to making a difference in young people’s lives.”

**Action:** “Listening sessions with youth who have experienced homelessness are essential. They ensure that the services provided truly meet our needs. This approach not only enhances the effectiveness of these programs but also dignifies our experiences as youth.”

### Image captions

**Listening frame:** “At this organization, we listen. Organizations need to recognize that people experiencing homelessness need specialized support. We know that their advice and experience is valuable in helping us develop the most effective programs.”

**Action frame:** “At this organization, we act. Following the advice and experience of people experiencing homelessness, we integrated essential family services into our programs. This shift has dramatically increased our effectiveness, ensuring that families not only survive but thrive together. Thanks to their advice and experience, our approach is more compassionate and responsive to the real needs of those we serve.”

# Usability Trials

## Stories

### Using a Systems-Competence Story

#### Narrative Elements to Include:

1. A named main character who was once unhoused but now has housing
2. A description of systemic factors that led to our main character losing housing
3. A success story showing that the main character's experience of homelessness was temporary because of systemic solutions that were put in place
4. A description of the ways in which the main character's experience of homelessness serves as a source of knowledge about homelessness
5. An emphasis on how that knowledge is valuable in creating solutions for issues of homelessness

## Values and Explanations

### ***Future Prosperity***

*Future Prosperity* refers to the idea that to build a prosperous future for us all, we need to value all forms of knowledge when we are creating solutions.

### ***Fairness***

*Fairness* refers to the idea that we should be fair and just in creating solutions to problems. To be fair we should include all forms of knowledge when we are creating solutions.

# Appendix C: Sample Survey Items

The following dependent variables were tested exclusively in Wave 1 of our survey experiments: support for experience, housing individualism, and collective responsibility.

Dependent variables largely stayed the same across both waves of the survey experiment. However, there were some dependent variables tested exclusively in Wave 1 and others tested exclusively in Wave 2. This approach enabled us to sharpen our survey objectives and incorporate updated dependent variables in the Wave 2 survey.

Here we list our dependent variables in three sections: Wave 1 (with items tested exclusively in Wave 1), Wave 2 (with items tested exclusively in Wave 2), and a section where we list the dependent variables that stayed the same across both waves.

## Tested Exclusively in Wave 1

### Support for expertise of those with lived experience

1. People who have been homeless know best what people currently experiencing homelessness need to thrive.
2. People who have been homeless should always have a say in how our society responds to homelessness.
3. We won't be able to end homelessness without listening to those who have experienced it.
4. Policy decisions aimed at ending homelessness should be informed by people who have been homeless.

### Causes of homelessness

Which perspective more closely aligns with your views?

- a. If people become homeless, it's primarily because of their own choices and values.
- b. If people become homeless, it's primarily because our laws, policies, and institutions have failed.

### Housing individualism (reversed scale)<sup>iii</sup>

1. An individual's lifestyle choices determine whether they become homeless.
2. Whether someone becomes homeless is largely determined by their willingness to work.

<sup>iii</sup> Because this is an unproductive way of thinking, the measurement scale on these items was reversed, such that a higher score meant lower health individualism.

3. A person can avoid homelessness if they make good life decisions.
4. Individuals are primarily responsible for whether they become homeless.

### **Collective responsibility, including people with lived experience (reversed scale)**

1. It is not our society's responsibility to ensure that people who have experienced homelessness have a say in how we respond to it.
2. We, as a society, are not obligated to value the advice from people who have been homeless.
3. We, as a society, are not responsible for ensuring people who have been homeless are leading efforts to end it.

## **Tested Exclusively in Wave 2**

### **Charity as the best way to solve homelessness (reversed scale)**

1. Donating to charitable organizations is the best way to solve homelessness.
2. The most effective way to end homelessness is to provide resources to those in need.
3. The best strategy to end homelessness is to give to those who are less fortunate.
4. The best way to solve homelessness is by supporting charities that give to those in need.

### **Expertise as the best way to solve homelessness**

1. Listening to people who have experienced homelessness is the best way to solve it.
2. Policies to end homelessness will only be effective when they are informed by people who have experienced it.
3. Solutions to end homelessness are most successful when guided by people who have lived through it.

### **Warmth and competence**

Note: Items 1–4 are traits associated with warmth; items 5–8 are traits associated with competence.

How often do you associate the following traits with people who are homeless? [5-point Likert scale: 1 = "Never"; 2 = "Rarely"; 3 = "Sometimes"; 4 = "Often"; 5 = "Always"]:

- |                |                |              |
|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| 1. Trustworthy | 4. Likable     | 7. Confident |
| 2. Friendly    | 5. Intelligent | 8. Capable   |
| 3. Honest      | 6. Skilled     |              |

## Individualism

1. What happens to an individual in their life is primarily the result of the choices they make.
2. How well people do in life is mostly determined by how much willpower and drive they have.
3. If someone works hard enough, they'll succeed in life.
4. How we do in life is our own responsibility and no one else's.

## Belief that people experiencing homelessness should express gratitude (reversed scale)

1. Homeless people should be grateful for any help they get.
2. It's important for homeless people to show gratitude for the help they receive.
3. Unhoused people ought to be thankful for the resources they receive.

## Government responsibility

1. It is our government's responsibility to ensure that people who have experienced homelessness have a say in how we respond to it.
2. Our government is obligated to value the advice from people who have experienced housing instability.
3. Our government is responsible for ensuring people who have been homeless are leading efforts to end it.
4. Our government is responsible for making sure that policies to end homelessness include insights from people who have experienced it (reverse scored).

# Tested in Both Waves

## Funding item

1. How willing are you to donate money to an organization working to end homelessness? [5-point Likert scale: 1 = "Not at all willing"; 2 = "Slightly willing"; 3 = "Moderately willing"; 4 = "Very willing"; 5 = "Extremely willing"]
2. Would you be more or less willing to donate to this organization if they include people who have experienced homelessness in their decision-making process? [6-point Likert scale: 1 = "Much less willing"; 2 = "Less willing"; 3 = "Slightly less willing"; 4 = "Slightly more willing"; 5 = "More willing"; 6 = "Much more willing"]

## Housing systemic

1. Our society's economic policies determine how many people experience homelessness.
2. We could end homelessness in our society if we changed our laws and policies.
3. How many people experience homelessness is determined by how our economy is set up.

## Collective efficacy of those with lived experience

1. How realistic is it to believe that—if given the chance—people who have been homeless can lead efforts to end it? *[5-point Likert scale: 1 = “Not at all realistic”; 2 = “Slightly realistic”; 3 = “Somewhat realistic”; 4 = “Moderately realistic”; 5 = “Extremely realistic”]*
2. I believe that people who have been homeless know what solutions are needed to end it. *[5-point Likert scale: 1 = “Strongly disagree”; 2 = “Disagree”; 3 = “Neither agree nor disagree”; 4 = “Agree”; 5 = “Strongly agree”]*
3. How optimistic are you that—if given the chance—people who have been homeless can help create policies to reduce homelessness? *[5-point Likert scale: 1 = “Not at all optimistic”; 2 = “Slightly optimistic”; 3 = “Somewhat optimistic”; 4 = “Fairly optimistic”; 5 = “Extremely optimistic”]*
4. How confident are you that—if given the chance—people who have experienced homelessness can effectively lead efforts to end it? *[5-point Likert scale: 1 = “Not at all confident”; 2 = “Slightly confident”; 3 = “Somewhat confident”; 4 = “Moderately confident”; 5 = “Extremely confident”]*

## Salience/support for including people with lived experience

1. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is offering funding to local governments who create programs to address homelessness. They are deciding whether or not these programs should be required to get guidance from people who have experienced homelessness. What do you think?
  - a. HUD should only provide funding to good programs that get guidance from people who have experienced homelessness.
  - b. HUD should provide funding to any good program that aims to end homelessness and should not require that they get guidance from people who have experienced homelessness.
2. A local government needs to select a program to address homelessness in their community. They have narrowed it down to two programs and need to choose one. Which program do you think the local government should choose to use?
  - a. Program A, which was developed by local officials in partnership with people who have experienced homelessness.
  - b. Program B, which was developed by local housing officials in partnership with local business owners.

3. How much do you support requiring all organizations working to address homelessness ask for guidance from people who have experienced it? [5-point Likert scale: 1 = "Not at all"; 2 = "A little"; 3 = "A moderate amount"; 4 = "A lot"; 5 = "Very much"]
4. Two political candidates are running for an upcoming election, and both of their platforms are focused on ending homelessness. The first candidate has a plan that involves working with community members, local officials, and people who have experienced homelessness. The second candidate has a plan that only involves working with community members, local officials, and business owners. How likely are you to vote for the first candidate over the second? [5-point Likert scale: 1 = "Not at all likely"; 2 = "Somewhat unlikely"; 3 = "Neither likely nor unlikely"; 4 = "Somewhat likely"; 5 = "Extremely likely"]

## Systemic changes to the nonprofit sector

How much do you favor or oppose the following policies? In considering these policies, please keep in mind that putting these policies in place might in some cases involve raising local and national taxes. [7-point Likert scale: 1 = "Strongly oppose"; 2 = "Oppose"; 3 = "Somewhat oppose"; 4 = "Neither favor nor oppose"; 5 = "Somewhat favor"; 6 = "Favor"; 7 = "Strongly favor"]

1. Mandate that people experiencing homelessness are consulted when housing policies are drafted
2. Pull funding from organizations focused on housing issues who do not include people with lived experience of homelessness in their work
3. Require that people who have been homeless make up at least 25 percent of employees at all organizations working to end homelessness
4. Give priority funding to organizations that pay people who have been homeless to consult on all programs aimed at ending homelessness

# Appendix D:

## Evidence Supporting Recommendations

### RECOMMENDATION #1

Use the value of *Future Prosperity* to explain how people with lived experience of homelessness have valuable knowledge to contribute.

To build understanding of the importance of including people with lived experience of homelessness in decision-making around solutions to address homelessness, we tested metaphors, an explanation, and values paired with the explanation.

In the survey experiment, we tested a base explanatory frame that describes how lived experience gives people practical and unique knowledge about homelessness. Compared to the control, participants who received the base explanatory frame were significantly more likely to agree that including people with lived experience in decision-making is the best way to solve the problem. We also tested this base explanatory frame combined with each of the values: *Future Prosperity*, *Innovation*, *Fairness*, and *Common Sense*. Respondents who saw frames that combined a value with the base explanation answered more productively than those who only saw the explanation.

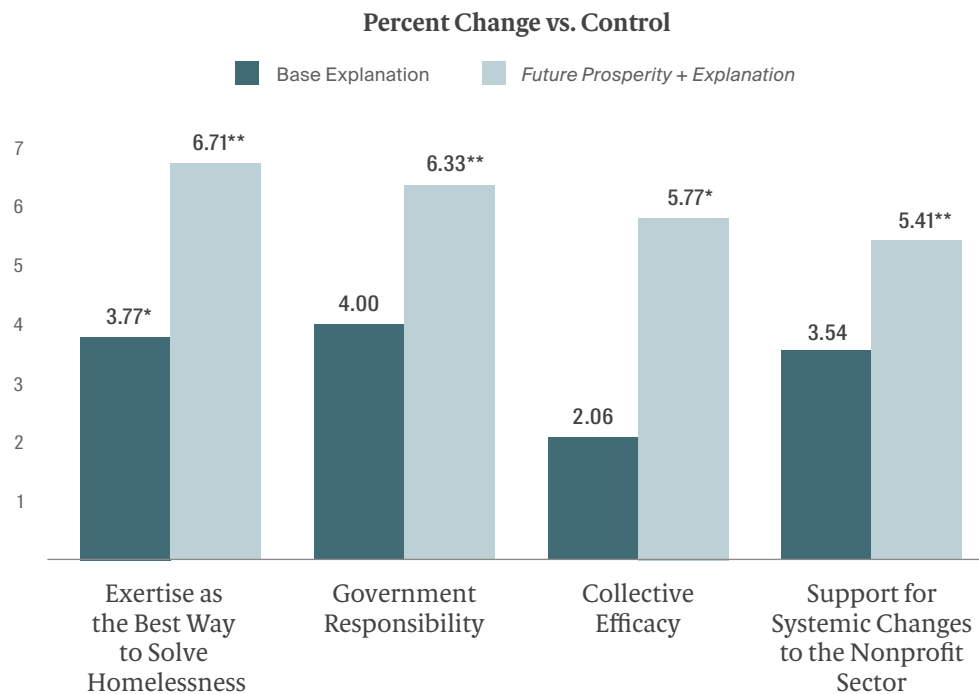
Although all the value + explanation frames performed well, the *Future Prosperity + explanation* performed the best. People who received the *Future Prosperity + explanation* frame were significantly more likely than those in the control group to: agree that including people with lived experience is the best way to solve homelessness; agree that the government has the responsibility to include people with lived experience in solving homelessness; believe that people who have lived experience can lead efforts to end homelessness; and favor systemic changes to the nonprofit sector.

We also tested whether these frames resonated with both people who lean Democratic and those who lean Republican. *Future Prosperity + explanation* tested well with people across the political spectrum. Specifically, Republicans who got this frame were significantly more likely than the control to: agree that homelessness is caused by structural issues rather than individual choices; agree that people with lived experience have the capacity to lead solutions to issues of homelessness; and express support for systemic changes to the nonprofit sector.

In the usability trials, we tested how those working in the nonprofit sector, as well as the advisory panel, used the frames *Future Prosperity + explanation* and *Fairness + explanation*. Both groups were able to engage with the *Future Prosperity + explanation* frame and could imagine this frame being used in their work.



**Figure 1: Effect of Base Explanation vs. *Future Prosperity + Explanation* on Key Outcomes**



\* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$

## RECOMMENDATION #2

# Harness the power of storytelling to tell stories about systems that highlight the competence of people with lived experience.

In the survey, we tested a few types of stories: an individual-competence story, systems-gratitude story, systems-competence story, and a systems-competence-gratitude story.

Participants who received the systems-competence story were significantly more likely than those who received the control to:

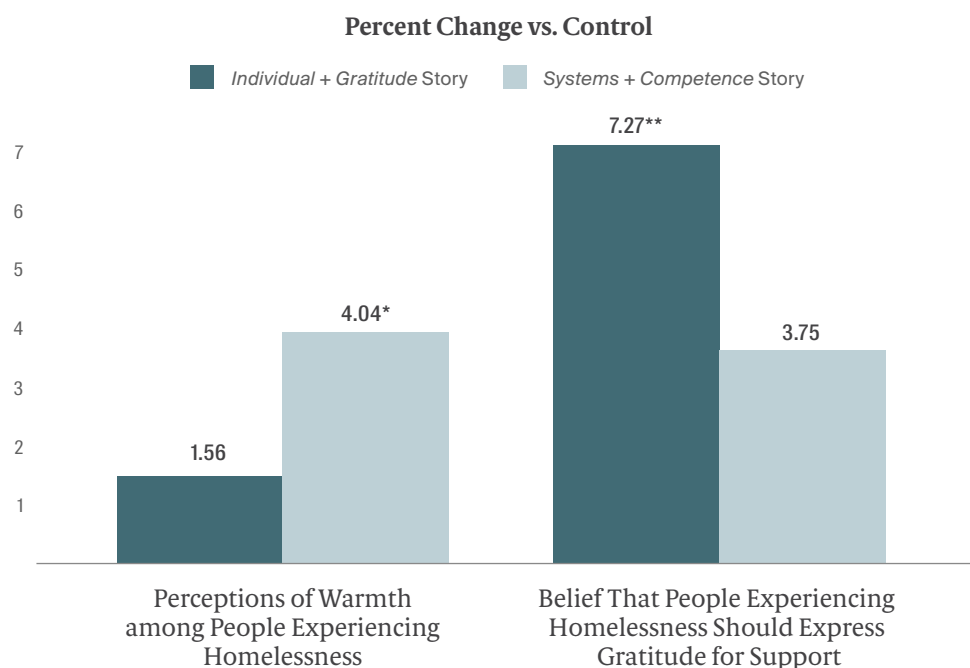
- Say they would be willing to donate to an organization that included people with lived experience of homelessness in their decision-making processes (Note: This measure is self-reported, so it may not correspond to donation behavior; however, it is an indicator of people's belief that they would donate.)
- Think that including people with lived experience in decision-making processes is the best way to approach creating solutions to homelessness
- Agree that the government has a responsibility to ensure that people who have experienced homelessness have a say in the policies to end it
- Agree that people with lived experience can lead and contribute to solutions to homelessness

- Support providing funding to programs that get guidance from people who have experienced homelessness over those programs that do not
- Say they would be more likely to support a political candidate that worked with people with lived experience in proposing solutions to homelessness over one that only worked with other members of the community

In addition, when compared to the control, the *systems + competence* story was the only story of all the stories tested that significantly increased people's perception of the warmth of people experiencing homelessness. We measured warmth because past literature suggests that when a group is considered high in warmth and competence, they are perceived as capable and effective at achieving their goals, solving problems, and performing tasks.<sup>30</sup> Figure 2 shows how the individual-gratitude story was ineffective at increasing the perception of warmth.

The individual-gratitude story backfired on the *Belief That People Experiencing Homelessness Should Express Gratitude for Support*, as shown in Figure 2. This measure was used as a proxy for *deservingness*, a mindset that assumes people are only deserving of help if they are grateful for any support they receive. This belief is counter to the understanding that homelessness is a structural injustice and we have a responsibility to solve it as a society. The individual-gratitude story significantly increases this unproductive outcome compared to the control. This suggests that the sector should avoid this type of story when talking about people with lived experience of homelessness.

**Figure 2: Effect of *Individual + Gratitude* Story vs. *Systems + Competence* Story on Key Outcomes**



\* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$

When the participants were separated by political ideology, the systems-competence story was the most productive story for shifting mindsets in Democrats. In this group, the individual-gratitude story also had significant backfires—notably increasing individualistic thinking. Systems-competence was also successful in shifting mindsets in Republicans, specifically increasing the belief that including lived experience in decision-making is the best way to solve homelessness; an understanding of government responsibility to include people with lived experience in creating solutions to homelessness; and increasing an understanding that people with lived experience are capable of leading and developing policy solutions to homelessness.

### RECOMMENDATION #3

## Always pair images with captions or quotes that present context and reference agency of people with lived experience of homelessness.

We conducted six focus groups with six members of the public each, totaling 36 participants. Our aim was to find out which types of images might be best used to discuss the contributions of people with lived experience. We tested images of individuals, families, people speaking to rooms of people, and people collaborating around a table.

Initially, we presented participants with images that portrayed people who had experienced homelessness without added quotes or captions. Regardless of the type of image, images that were presented alone, without additional context (in the form of quotes or captions), didn't shift thinking away from individualistic ideas about people experiencing homelessness and individualistic solutions to address homelessness. These images also often resulted in participant reactions of pity toward individuals experiencing homelessness. However, when participants were asked to use the images with quotes and citations that talked about systemic solutions to address homelessness and the role of individuals experiencing homelessness in those solutions, participants' thinking shifted to see the role of broader systems and structures and the importance of including people with lived experience of homelessness in solutions to address the problem.

Our research also demonstrates that presenting authentic pictures is important. Participants easily identified stock images and were skeptical of seemingly inauthentic pictures, suggesting they would not trust an organization that used inauthentic images. This gives insight into how *System Is Rigged* thinking, applied to nonprofits, is triggered unproductively when people perceive that images are inauthentic.

#### RECOMMENDATION #4:

### Use captions or quotes that emphasize the concrete steps taken in response to guidance from people with lived experience.

In our six focus groups with the public, we paired the images we initially presented without context with quotes and captions. When participants were presented with quotes that expressed the pictured person's gratitude, they perceived the message as disempowering and disingenuous, thereby triggering the *System Is Rigged* thinking applied to nonprofits. Similarly, the caption that described the organization "listening" to people with lived experience triggered suspicion or disbelief about the intentions of nonprofits to meaningfully include people with lived experience of homelessness. However, the caption that described the detailed actions taken in response to the contributions of people with lived experience was able to overcome the unproductive thinking about nonprofits as disingenuous and build understanding of the importance of meaningfully including people with lived experience in nonprofits' work.

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# How to Talk about the Importance of Lived Experience in Solving Homelessness

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