



Communicating the Social Implications of AI

A Framing Toolkit



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How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is designed for advocates, organizers, communicators, and policy leaders who are working to shape public understanding of the social implications of artificial intelligence (AI). It translates research-based framing insights into practical guidance you can use in messaging, campaigns, media, policy advocacy, and movement communications.

Use this toolkit to:

- Build shared understanding across your coalition
- Diagnose messaging challenges
- Develop narratives, talking points, and examples
- Align communications about AI across issues (education, health, housing, labor, family policy, etc.)

The goal is to help people understand **how AI works in society, who shapes it, who benefits, and what it takes to ensure it serves the public interest.**

The Framing Challenge

Public conversations about AI are dominated by two unproductive storylines:

- **Techno-optimism:** AI is inevitable progress that will make life easier and more efficient.
- **Techno-dystopia:** AI is an autonomous force that threatens humanity, jobs, and social life.

Both obscure what matters most for social change: **AI is a human-made system embedded in existing power structures.** Without that understanding, people struggle to:

- Recognize harm as systemic rather than accidental
- See regulation as necessary and legitimate
- Imagine how AI could be designed and governed for public benefit

This toolkit offers a framing strategy that redirects attention away from fear and hype, and toward **human agency, social systems, and justice.**

Core Framing Principles

Use these principles as a checklist for any communication about AI.

1. Start with Explanation

Begin by explaining *how AI works* in plain terms. Explanation creates the foundation people need to reason about solutions.

2. Separate AI from Human Intelligence

Explicitly distinguish AI from human thinking. This reduces fatalism and fear and opens space for accountability and governance.

3. Make Human Involvement Visible

Always foreground the people and institutions that design, train, deploy, and use AI systems.

4. Connect AI to Social Systems

Help people see AI as part of larger systems—health care, education, policing, child welfare, labor markets—not as a stand-alone gadget or app.

5. Lead toward Collective Solutions

Frame problems as systemic and solvable through public action, policy, and shared responsibility.

Section 1: Define AI Clearly and Consistently

Recommended Definition

“AI is a computer process designed to identify patterns in large amounts of data and use those patterns to make predictions or support decisions.”

Why This Works

- Counters myths about consciousness or autonomy
- Grounds AI in data and design choices
- Creates space to talk about bias, power, and accountability

Avoid

- Metaphors that imply AI “thinks,” “decides,” or “knows” on its own
- Overly technical explanations that shut people down

Tip for Communicators

Use this definition early and repeat it often. Help your audiences maintain a clear and accurate sense of what AI is and how it works.

Section 2: Distinguish AI from Human Intelligence

Key Point

AI does not have awareness, judgment, or lived experience. It processes data, but it does not understand the world the way humans do.

Why This Matters

When people believe AI is intelligent in a human sense, they are more likely to:

- Treat its outputs as objective or unquestionable
- Accept harm as inevitable
- Assume humans cannot intervene or govern its use

This frame reassures people that **humans remain responsible** for how AI is used.

Example Language

“AI doesn’t replace human judgment—it reflects the choices humans make.”

Section 3: Explain How Bias Enters AI Systems

Core Idea

Data are socially produced. When AI is trained on data shaped by inequality, it reflects and reinforces those inequalities.

What to Emphasize

- Social inequities show up in data patterns.
- Bias is systemic, not a glitch or a bad-actor problem.

Use the *Echo* Metaphor

“AI echoes what already exists in society. When societies are inequitable and unjust, those characteristics are echoed in AI results.”

Use the *Amplify* Metaphor

“AI acts like an amplifier: When bias exists in the data or systems it learns from, AI turns up the volume, spreading those biases farther, faster, and across more people’s lives.”

Avoid

- Framing bias as accidental or rare
- Overemphasizing individual intent or individual programmer prejudice

Section 4: Make Human Roles Visible at Every Stage

Key Message

AI systems involve people at every step—from deciding what data to use to interpreting and applying results.

Stages to Name

- Choosing goals and purposes
- Selecting and cleaning data
- Designing and testing systems
- Deciding how outputs are used in real-world decisions

Why This Works

This frame restores agency and responsibility to humans. It helps people see that AI outcomes are design **choices**, not fate.

Sample Language

“Behind every AI system are people making decisions about what counts, what matters, and who is affected.”

Section 5: Frame AI as an Issue of Power

Core Frame

AI reflects who has power in society—and is often used in ways that sustain that power.

What to Name Explicitly

- Concentration of control in corporations and institutions
- Whose interests shape AI design and deployment
- Who bears the risks and who gains the benefits

Why This Matters

Power framing:

- Encourages systemic thinking
- Increases support for regulation and oversight
- Shifts blame away from individual bad actors toward unjust systems and structures

Example

“When a small group controls the data and systems that guide decisions, AI ends up serving their interests—unless the public demands something different.”

Section 6: Use Contextual Examples Grounded in Social Justice

Abstract discussions of AI are hard to grasp. Concrete examples help people see real-world stakes.

Effective Contexts

- Education
- Health care
- Child welfare
- Housing
- Employment
- Policing and surveillance

What Strong Examples Do

- Name the data being used
- Explain how inequities enter the system
- Show concrete harm
- Point toward better alternatives

Example Structure

1. What decision is being made?
2. What data are used?
3. How does existing inequality shape that data?
4. Who is harmed and why?

Section 7: Lead with the Value of Justice

Shared Value

Everyone deserves to be treated fairly and protected from harm—especially by systems that shape their lives.

Why *Justice* Works

The value of *Justice* is widely shared and morally grounding. It helps people:

- Recognize AI's role in everyday life
- See regulation as a way to guide AI in the public interest
- Imagine AI serving the common good

Sample Value Statement

“Technology should help create a fairer society—not deepen existing inequities.”

Section 8: What to Avoid

Don't	Do
■ Lead with narratives that portray AI as an unstoppable force beyond human control. ■ Describe AI as if it has its own intentions, motivations, or agency. ■ Frame the harms of AI as inevitable rather than the result of choices about how technologies are designed, governed, and deployed. ■ Place responsibility on individuals to navigate AI on their own instead of emphasizing the role of public policy, democratic oversight, and institutional accountability.	■ Show that AI is shaped by human decisions and can be redesigned to advance the public good. ■ Focus on the institutions, policies, and power structures that determine how AI affects our lives. ■ Situate AI within larger struggles to build equitable, democratic systems that work for everyone.

Section 9: Putting It All Together

A Sample Framed Message

AI is a computer process that identifies patterns in data and uses them to inform decisions. Because our institutions and systems have been shaped by long-standing inequities, the data used to build AI often reflects those same patterns of exclusion and discrimination. When AI is used in areas like health care, education, housing, hiring, or child welfare, it can reinforce and amplify existing injustices—especially for communities that have been historically marginalized. But AI is not an independent force. People decide how these systems are designed, what data they rely on, where they are deployed, and whose interests they serve. That means we can shape a different future by establishing strong public oversight, democratic accountability, and policies that ensure AI advances equity, protects people’s rights and dignity, and works for the common good rather than concentrating power.

Final Note for Communicators

Framing is not about finding the perfect message—it’s about **building shared understanding over time**. When progressive movements speak with clarity and discipline about AI, they can:

- Build public understanding of how AI shapes people’s lives
- Increase public support for strong, accountable governance of AI
- Connect AI to broader struggles for justice, democracy, and collective wellbeing
- Use this toolkit to align your communications, strengthen your narratives, and help shape an AI future that truly serves the public interest.

Communicating the Social Implications of AI

A Communications Toolkit



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