



Framing Strategies for Systemically Connecting Race, Class, and Place



The places where we live are shaped by political and economic choices. Across the United States, generations of working-class communities, particularly Black and Indigenous communities, have organized against systems that extract wealth and resources. Today, there is a growing recognition that “the system” does not work for everyone. This is an opening to build understanding of how those systems work and how communities can build support for creating change—and belief that change is possible.

Over two years, FrameWorks collaborated with power-building leaders to develop and test a framing strategy for communicating about these issues, building on the longstanding work of movements for racial and economic justice. It is built around the following steps:

1. Explain the Systems at Play → 2. Emphasize Community Power → 3. Show a Better Future

1. Explain the Systems at Play

Expand the Idea of Extraction

Start with familiar examples of literal extraction, such as mining, drilling, or fracking. Then extend the idea metaphorically: corporations and wealthy interests can extract workers’ time and energy through low wages, take good jobs out of communities, or redirect public resources toward private profit.

Use the metaphor of extraction to connect everyday experiences—low wages, disappearing jobs, rising costs of things like healthcare and housing, underfunded schools and services—to a larger system in which wealth, resources, and value are pulled out of communities and concentrated among a wealthy few.

THE KEY MOVE:

Explain the connection between local issues by talking about the larger system of wealth extraction.

Show How Race was Made

Explain race as a social and political construction, rather than a natural division between people. Show how racial categories and hierarchies were created and used to justify the dispossession of Indigenous people, the exploitation of Black people, and the concentration of wealth and power, and how policies and institutions continue to reproduce those hierarchies today.

Make the connection between history and the present concrete. And most importantly, emphasize that systems created through human decisions are not inevitable. If people made them, people can remake them. Pair historical explanations with examples of communities that have organized and won to reinforce that possibility.

THE KEY MOVE:

Use history to explain why injustice was built and how it can be changed.

2. Emphasize Communities' Power to Fight Back

Lead with Joy and Power

Treat community joy as a source of community power, not as something separate from struggle. This can show up in a couple ways:

- You may want to connect joy to the material conditions that allow communities to flourish: clean air and water, affordable housing, green space, thriving schools and services, and places where people can gather and care for one another. At the same time, name the powerful interests and systems that threaten those conditions in pursuit of profit.
- It may also be important to acknowledge that community joy is ultimately inviolable and persists under conditions of oppression.

The point is not simply that communities are resilient. It is that joy can help sustain collective action and build the power to change what happens in a community.

THE KEY MOVE:

Showcase joy, and connect that to the power to protect and expand it.

Use “Fighting” Language to Show that Organizing Can Win

Don't stop at “raising awareness,” “speaking up,” or “giving people a voice.” Our research found that the “fight” metaphor is more effective than the “voice” metaphor at helping people in impacted communities see themselves as capable of organizing and making change. “Voice” can suggest that political action is primarily about expressing an opinion or being heard. “Fight” communicates action, urgency, and the possibility of winning.

Make the fight specific: Who is the opponent? What is at stake? What actions can people take? What would winning look like? Emphasize the power of numbers and make clear that the outcome is not predetermined.

THE KEY MOVE:

Move from “we need to be heard” to “we can build enough power to win.”

3. Reimagine the Future

Paint the Future as a Choice

Give people a vivid picture of what their community could look like if people organize and win: families able to stay in their homes, well-funded schools, good jobs, clean air and water, thriving public spaces, and people with real power over the decisions that shape their lives. Contrast this with the alternative that is just as vivid: a future where the community has not organized and things have gotten worse. Then present the choice between these two futures.

Our research found that future visions can help people overcome fatalism while making a better future feel more possible; making change feel more urgent; and making our choices and actions today feel more consequential.

THE KEY MOVE:

Make clear that the future is not inevitable by contrasting two possible futures. The choices we make and the power we build together shape what comes next.

