Reframing Hunger in America

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A FrameWorks Message Brief

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Rose Hendricks, PhD, Researcher
Emilie L'Hôte, PhD, Manager of Qualitative Research and Senior Researcher
Andrew Volmert, PhD, Director of Research
Moira O'Neil, PhD, Director of Research Interpretation & Application

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Introduction

The United States of America is one of the wealthiest countries on earth, yet more than 12 percent of its population—or one in eight residents—don't have sufficient access to affordable, nutritious food. Hunger experts and advocates recognize that too many Americans can't get enough nutritious food, and they understand that systemic factors cause this problem. To eliminate hunger, they call for systemic change, in addition to bolstering existing services and programs that increase access to affordable, healthy food. However, members of the American public hold a number of deeply ingrained assumptions about food, hunger, and existing food assistance programs that impede public understanding and block support for needed policy change. For this reason, communicators need an empirically based framing strategy that anticipates challenges in public thinking about hunger and redirects it in more productive directions.

This report, produced by the FrameWorks Institute for Food Policy Action Education Fund and A Place at the Table and funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, lays out such a strategy. It enumerates recommendations that are derived from qualitative and quantitative research. Each recommendation describes the communications challenge it can help overcome—in other words, how it can help members of the public think in ways that align with expert perspectives—and the research findings that inform it.

The research suggests that communicators adopt the following guidelines:

- Use the term *hunger* to generate concern about the issue.
- Broaden the definition of "hunger" by emphasizing the quantity and quality of food.
- Use effective explanatory metaphors[1] to generate a systemic and collective understanding of hunger.
    - Compare the food system to a power grid to explain the geographic determinants of hunger.
    - Use the *Food Ecosystem* metaphor to explain the economic determinants of hunger.
- Tell different types of experiential stories to counter stereotypes and help people identify with the experience of hunger.
- Use issue frames and information about prevalence to increase support for expanding existing food assistance programs.
- Explain and emphasize how food assistance programs can be improved and strengthened.

Each recommendation will make a difference on its own; taken together, the whole will be greater than the sum of its parts. Read on to learn about the recommendations in greater detail, about the evidence behind them, and how to put them into practice in communications.

What communications research does a field need to reframe an issue?

What do researchers, policy experts, and advocates know about hunger?

To distill expert consensus on hunger in America, FrameWorks conducted a review of core materials provided by Food Policy Action Education Fund and A Place at the Table.

How does the public think?

To document the cultural understandings that Americans draw upon to make sense of hunger, FrameWorks conducted in-depth interviews with members of the public and analyzed the transcripts to identify the public's cultural models—the implicit, shared understandings and assumptions that structure how the public thinks about the issue. Twenty interviews were conducted in Billings, MT; Frederick, MD; and Minneapolis in February and March 2018. See Appendix A for information about methodology.

What frames shift thinking?

To systematically identify effective ways of talking about hunger, FrameWorks developed a set of messages and tested them with a sample of Americans. FrameWorks also conducted survey experiments with a combined total of 5,354 respondents to test the effectiveness of various messaging frames on public understanding, attitudes, and support for programs and policies. The samples were nationally representative in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, education, and household income. Appendix B explains what it means for frames to "work" in the survey experiments.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Use the term *hunger* to generate concern about the issue.

Experts note that food insecurity is widespread in the United States, affecting approximately 12 percent of US families. The American public, on the other hand, does not think food insecurity or hunger is pervasive in this country. This understanding is largely shaped by two dominant cultural models:

- **The *Land of Plenty* Cultural Model**
  Members of the public know that the United States is a wealthy nation. As a consequence, they assume that the population's basic food needs are met and that there is no shortage of food in the country. People describe the United States as a cornucopia—a land of plenty—and reason that Americans' main problem with food is one of *excess*—not scarcity.

- **The *Hunger Is Foreign* Cultural Model**
  Americans strongly associate the words "hunger" and "malnutrition" with undeveloped regions of the world (e.g., Sub-Saharan Africa) and with children in particular. When thinking about hunger in America, they associate it with extreme destitution (e.g., people who are homeless). People do, at times, recognize that some Americans suffer from hunger or malnutrition, but their widespread assumption is that these are problems in other parts of the world—not the United States.

These models make it hard for Americans to understand that food insecurity is a serious problem in this country. If people associate hunger with other countries, and particularly with children in other countries, they won't likely see this problem—or its prevalence—in the United States. These models pose a major challenge for communicators, as they touch on deep understandings of what America is and has been and its place in the world hierarchy.

To correct these misconceptions, FrameWorks explored whether the term *food insecurity* helps people better understand hunger in America. A survey experiment found this was *not* the case. In the experiment, FrameWorks found that people are not familiar with the term *food insecurity* and often confuse its meaning. For example, survey participants often interpreted this term as describing guilt over food choices, trouble sticking to a diet, or eating disorders. That is, participants defaulted to a colloquial definition of *insecurity*. The term *hunger* does have its limitations, but researchers found that people *do* see hunger as an important policy priority—and one that ranks higher than *food insecurity*. Research suggests that the term *hunger* is effective, although, as discussed below, it must be explained to build understanding.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Broaden the definition of *hunger* by emphasizing the quantity and quality of food.

Experts define hunger broadly—as lacking not only *enough* food but also enough *nutritious* food.[2] The public, on the other hand, understands hunger as the complete absence of food. People associate hunger with body aches and stomach cramps, and the term brings to mind the pangs of physical discomfort that come from missing a meal or fasting for a short period rather than the long-term malaise that arises from a severe, chronic lack of food.

To broaden the public's understanding of hunger, communicators should explicitly and consistently define the term. When possible, they should define the term *hunger* not only as an insufficient *quantity* of food but also an insufficient *quality* of it. Doing so will not only bring public thinking into alignment with expert understandings but also make it easier for people to recognize the range of circumstances under which people might experience hunger—and that these circumstances are very much part of contemporary American life.

For example:

> "In America today, more than 41 million people—or about one in eight Americans—experience hunger, which means they aren't able to get enough food or they aren't able to get enough healthy food."

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Use effective explanatory metaphors to generate a systemic and collective understanding of hunger.

Experts point to numerous systemic obstacles that undermine access to an adequate supply of healthy food. Some barriers are geographic. People in rural areas, for example, sometimes have to drive long distances to reach grocery stores that sell healthy, affordable food. Many people in cities can't access the food they need, either, often because they live in areas without quality grocery stores and don't have access to safe and reliable transportation. Other barriers are economic. Unemployment, low household assets, and inadequate benefits (e.g., health insurance) all contribute to hunger in the United States.[3]

The public, on the other hand, believes that individual shortcomings, such as laziness or a failure to budget properly, are the primary causes of hunger and food insecurity. These beliefs are driven by the following cultural models:

- **The *Individualism* Cultural Model**
  People assume that life outcomes are the result of individual choices. When people apply the *Individualism* model, they see an individual's choices as the main—if not only—determinant of how much food they have access to, and whether or not it is healthy.

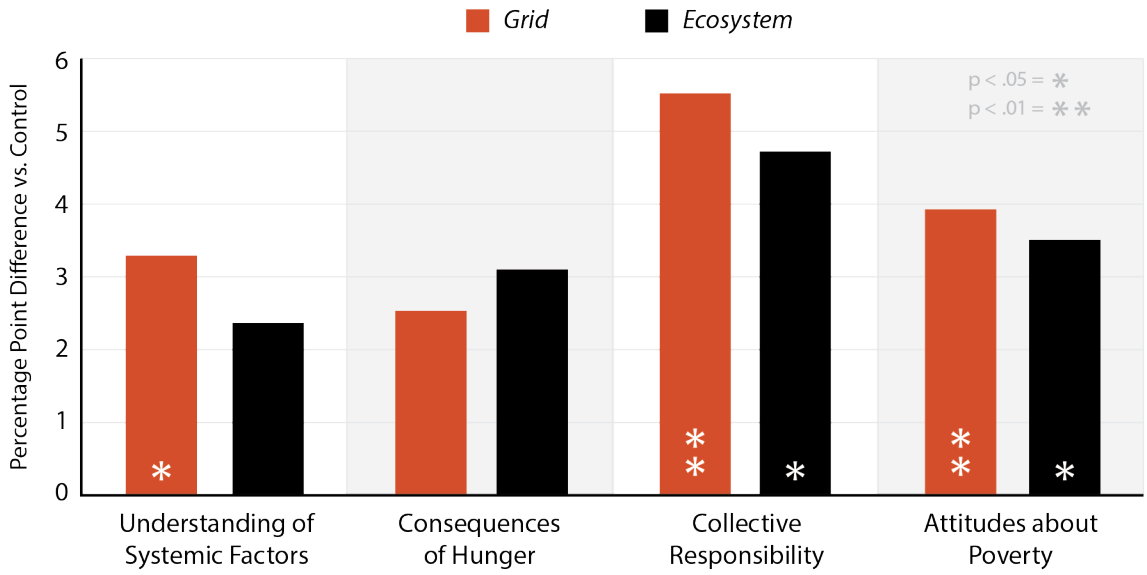
- **The *Mentalism* Cultural Model**
  Mentalism goes hand-in-hand with *Individualism*. *Mentalism* is used to reason about *why* people do—or don't—make certain choices. Using this model, people reason that the choices individuals make are primarily, or even exclusively, determined by individual discipline and strength of will. Thinking with this model, people reason that Americans with "bad" diets willingly choose unhealthy foods, are lazy, or are unable to resist the temptation of tasty—but unhealthy—foods.

- **The *Balanced Budget* Cultural Model**
  People widely assume that people cannot pay for adequate food because of irresponsible money management practices. They think that people who do not have money for food have failed to find jobs or make responsible financial choices.

The *Individualism*, *Mentalism*, and *Balanced Budget* models mask the causes of hunger that are beyond individual control. They lead people to understand hunger and food insecurity as the result of a failure to make good choices or exert willpower. As a result, they encourage people to conclude that individuals, not systems, are the problem, and that individuals, not systems, are responsible for fixing the problem.

Research found that two comparisons for the food system—one to a power grid and another to ecosystem—shifted thinking about the causes of hunger and responsibility for addressing it. As Figure 1 illustrates, both metaphors boost understanding of the systemic and environmental causes of hunger in the United States. (NB: The *Ecosystem* metaphor approached but did not reach the level of statistical significance on the measure of causal understanding.) Compared to participants who did not read either metaphor, those who did read a metaphor demonstrated more expert-like understanding of the causes of hunger. In addition, comparing the food system to both a power grid and an ecosystem broadened thinking not only about the causes of hunger but also about poverty more generally, helping people understand that poverty results from systemic causes, rather than individuals' actions. In turn, these metaphors led people to feel a greater sense of *collective* responsibility—that our government and our society have a responsibility to reduce hunger. The *Ecosystem* metaphor's effects on understanding of the consequences of hunger also approached significance (p = .054).

Figure 1: Effects of Explanatory Metaphors



While both metaphors generated more systemic and more collective understandings of hunger, closer inspection reveals that they shift thinking in slightly different ways and should be used in complementary fashion.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Compare the food system to a power grid to explain the *geographic* causes of hunger.

Comparing the food system to a power grid will help communicators explain the geographic barriers to accessing affordable, healthy food facing both rural residents (who often must travel long distances to reach quality grocery stores) and urban residents (who often lack adequate transportation to reach grocery stores). The comparison helps people see that food isn't distributed equally to all parts of the country and that people who live in areas with "patchy" food coverage face difficulty getting healthy food.

In the survey experiment, the message describing the food system as a power grid had the strongest effects on survey questions that concerned geographic factors. Participants who read an excerpt with this comparison were more likely to agree that some people experience hunger because they cannot get to grocery stores that sell affordable, healthy food. In open-ended responses, these participants were also more likely to focus on (1) areas where hunger is especially common (such as communities with high concentrations of low-income households and few grocery stores) and (2) the importance of building good grocery stores where none exist.

The following excerpt contains the core components of the metaphor:

> "Just like we need a power grid that delivers electricity to all the parts of our country, we also need a grid that allows healthy food to move to all parts of our country. Right now, that grid is well-developed in some areas and patchy or even non-existent in others. For example, some people lack good nearby grocery stores, so the food they need can't reach them. The end result is that, in many areas of our country, affordable, healthy food is not available."

To recap: Compare the food system to a power grid to help people understand the geographic causes of hunger and to suppress patterns of thinking that blame individuals.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Use the *Food Ecosystem* metaphor to explain the *economic* causes of hunger.

Comparing the food system to an ecosystem helps people recognize how economic factors contribute to hunger. This metaphor explains how factors like low wages and high costs of living disrupt the "balance" of the food ecosystem and, in so doing, helps people see economic factors in systemic—rather than individualistic—terms.

In the survey experiment, participants who read an excerpt with the *Ecosystem* metaphor were more likely to agree that fewer people would need to rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—the federal government's food program for low-income individuals and families—if good jobs were easier to find. They were also more likely to agree that adults who receive SNAP benefits are likely working or trying to find work.

Comparing our food system to an ecosystem also highlights the societal consequences of hunger, particularly the idea that hunger undermines our country's economic success. In the survey experiment, people who read the *Food Ecosystem* metaphor were more likely to agree that hunger affects productivity. At the same time, they were less likely to describe hunger as a result of individuals' choices and more likely to describe it as a result of a lack of affordable food.

The following excerpt contains the core components of the metaphor:

> "Our food system in America is like an ecosystem. It's made of many parts, including the government, which subsidizes and regulates food, farmers, and the food industry, and sellers and consumers. These parts need to work together for the whole system to function properly and stay in balance. But things like low wages, high costs of living, and lack of good, nearby grocery stores disrupt the food ecosystem for consumers and throw the whole thing out of balance. These disruptions mean that sometimes the food that people need can't make its way through the system and get to them as it should."

This metaphor can be adapted to show numerous components of the food system, such as production, distribution, and prices. The following excerpt highlights its flexibility:

> "If we think about our food system like an ecosystem, it's easy to see how some of our current practices can throw that system off balance. When farmers' crop yields decrease because of bad weather or disease, food prices increase. When food is more expensive, the food ecosystem breaks down, and people cannot get the food they need. Let's make sure our policies and practices maintain balance within our food ecosystem so that everyone gets the food they need."

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Avoid explaining economic causes of hunger without a metaphor.

Please note: simply connecting hunger to the broader economy is not sufficient. The experiment included a message that discussed economic causes and consequences of hunger in the United States without a metaphor. This condition *decreased* support for relevant policy solutions, such as increasing funding for existing food programs. The value of *Collective Prosperity,* which encouraged people to focus on societal economic benefits of addressing hunger, was also ineffective in isolation, decreasing people's sense that hunger is prevalent in the United States. This value also led people to talk about hunger as a result of

laziness and to describe recipients of social benefits as abusing the system. These results indicate that communicators should not simply *assert* that hunger is an economic issue but should *explain* (via the tested metaphors) how the economic and food systems shape individuals' options.

RECOMMENDATION 7:

Tell different types of experiential stories to counter stereotypes and help people identify with the experience of hunger.

Experts know that the causes of hunger are diverse. They note that many SNAP recipients—including those who are employed—do not earn enough to cover their expenses and that SNAP fraud is rare. The public, on the other hand, relies heavily on cultural models that are bound up with negative stereotypes of those who experience hunger and receive public benefits.

- **The *Culture of Poverty* Cultural Model**
  There is a widespread sense that, in certain communities, shared cultural norms and values perpetuate poverty. People describe this "culture" in highly moralized, "othering" terms: "those" poor people, they say, lack basic values, especially those relating to hard work and the desire to provide for themselves and their families. Participants frequently drew on this model to explain why many people eat low-quality food, do not have the food they need, or require government assistance to get the food they need.

- **The *SNAP Royalty* Stereotype**
  People consistently argue that those who rely on government assistance, and particularly SNAP benefits, are morally undeserving, dishonest, lazy, and on the hunt for ways to cheat the system to meet their desires for free. Participants, for example, shared numerous stories of SNAP beneficiaries receiving lavish sums of money and benefits that they did not need, trading SNAP benefits for cash, or using SNAP benefits to buy prohibited goods. While race was almost never openly discussed in connection with this stereotype, participants' descriptions echoed openly racist tropes.[4]

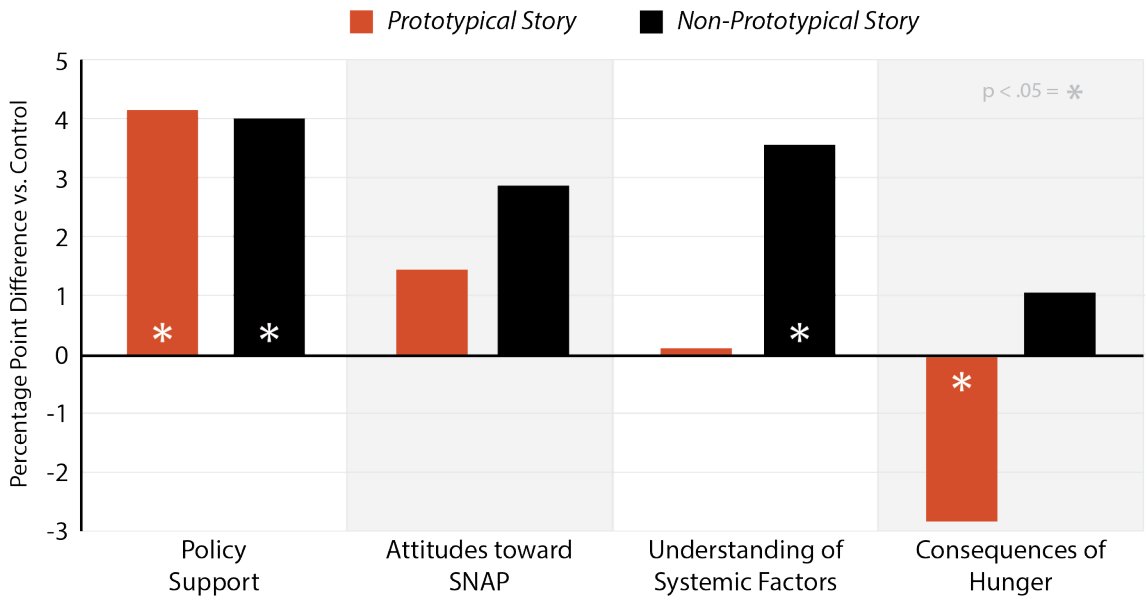
The *Culture of Poverty* model and *SNAP Royalty* stereotype stigmatize communities that experience hunger. In contrast to the individualistic models above, the *Culture of Poverty* model brings environments into view; yet because environments are understood in moralized, cultural terms, this model merely shifts blame from individuals to families, communities, and class cultures. It lies at the root of the *SNAP Royalty* stereotype, and it fuels a vitriolic response to people who receive food assistance. Communicators therefore need strategies to displace these unproductive models and advance more productive ways of thinking about people who rely on government assistance.

Research that FrameWorks recently conducted on related issues, such as homelessness, suggests that telling stories about different types of people and circumstances will broaden thinking about who

experiences hunger and why.[5] To explore this idea in the context of hunger, researchers tested the effects of telling prototypical and non-prototypical stories about SNAP recipients. The prototypical story—the story that fits existing images of the circumstances in which people experience hunger—explained the situation of a woman who is homeless and depends on assistance from strangers, food banks, and the government. The non-prototypical story was about a working mother whose income is not high enough to support her family. Both stories explained that the lack of adequate SNAP benefits is a cause of hunger. In this way, they deliberately shifted blame away from the individuals. While the prototypical story fit the existing prototype, it did not reinforce the *SNAP Royalty* stereotype and instead was, like the non-prototypical story, designed to help people recognize what it is like to experience circumstances that lead to hunger.

Both experiential stories increased support for policies that would reduce hunger, such as doubling funding levels for governmental food assistance programs and raising the minimum wage (see Figure 2). This effect is likely the result of participants' emotional connection to the individuals in the stories; they help people *feel* what it is like to experience these circumstances, which makes them less likely to think in stereotypical terms and more likely to support collective solutions. The non-prototypical story generated a more systemic understanding of causes, which likely explains why it was more effective in combatting negative attitudes toward SNAP recipients. (The results approached statistical significance on this outcome, with a p-value of 0.06.) The prototypical story did not reinforce unproductive stereotypes, but it did decrease people's sense of how prevalent hunger is in the United States. Because it tied hunger to less common circumstances, this story made it harder for people to recognize the wide range of situations in which people experience hunger.

Figure 2: Effects of Experiential Stories



Participants' open-ended responses reinforced the closed-ended results, which are reported in the graph. Those who heard the prototypical story were more likely to talk about homelessness, associating hunger only with destitution, while those who received the non-prototypical story were much more likely to talk about economic factors outside individuals' control—such as low wages, high food costs, and the cost of living more generally. And they were less likely to fall back on individualistic assumptions, such as expecting people to take care of themselves and be self-sufficient.

These results illustrate the power of experiential stories and the importance of telling *different* stories. Non-prototypical stories are important, as they bring systemic factors more clearly into view, but this doesn't mean that communicators should *only* tell stories about the working poor, as this will likely reinforce the distinction between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor.

The following excerpt models a non-prototypical story:

> "More than 41 million Americans—about one in eight—experience hunger: they don't have enough food or enough healthy food. Anita is one of those people. She is a mother of two and works a minimum-wage job. Each month she receives a small amount of money toward groceries from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as 'Food Stamps.' But, like her wages, SNAP benefits are low, so she often cannot afford enough healthy food."

RECOMMENDATION 8:

Use issue frames and information about prevalence to increase support for expanding existing food assistance programs.

Experts explain that existing federal programs don't adequately address hunger in the United States because they are insufficiently funded and eligibility criteria are too restrictive. The public, on the other hand, believes that these programs already meet people's basic needs and that the government should provide only what is necessary and ensure that benefits are fraud-proof. These beliefs flow from the following cultural models:

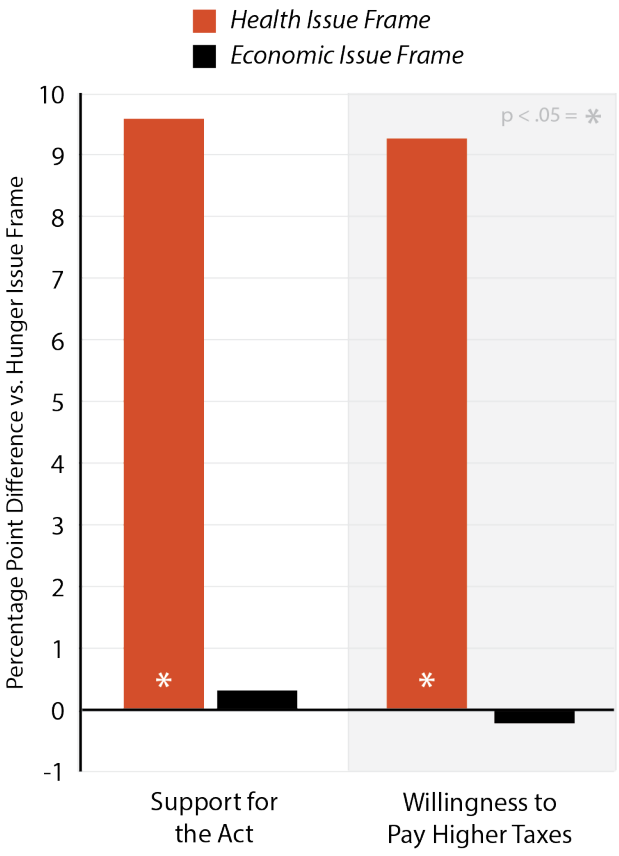
- **The *Basic Needs* Cultural Model**
  Members of the public agree that everyone in the United States should have their basic needs (e.g., food and shelter) met. As a result, they express initial support for most relief programs that aim to fill those needs—whether they are run by government, churches, or charities. Programs like Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), SNAP, food banks, food pantries, and the National School Lunch Program have value in the eyes of the public because they ensure that all Americans have access to food and other basic necessities.

And yet, despite unyielding support for basic food assistance, the *Basic Needs* model *undermines* support for a more robust system. This is because the model draws a clear line between food *needs* (generally understood as a sufficient quantity of food) and food *wants* (generally understood to include nutritious food). In this model, society is only responsible for providing the former.

- **The *Adequate Help* Cultural Model**
  Members of the public assume that the mere existence of relief programs meets people's needs. In other words, the existence of a program is proof that it is sufficient to alleviate hunger among the population it serves. While people have some knowledge of the many relief programs that are in place, they only have a vague sense of how these programs operate or who is responsible for them.

The *Adequate Help* and *Basic Needs* models depress support for maintaining and expanding existing programs. When thinking with these models, people reason that the primary goal of food assistance programs is to ensure that people have enough food (no matter its quality). Because many programs already exist, people see little reason to strengthen food assistance.

Figure 3: Effects of Health and Economic Frames among Republicans and Support for Hunger Legislation



Communicators need strategies to build support for existing programs and for more robust forms of social assistance. As noted above, experiential stories are one strategy. Our research found that issue frames also have substantial effects on people's level of support for food and social assistance programs—though these effects differ depending on political party identification.

Republicans who read a message that described hunger as a health issue and that drew attention to the health effects of hunger were more likely to support legislation that would double funding for food programs like SNAP, build an additional grocery store in every low-income neighborhood, and strengthen other public programs for low-income families. Another group of Republican respondents received a message that included the same information about the prevalence of hunger but that *lacked* a focus on health; they were less supportive of the legislation and less willing to pay higher taxes to fund it. In other words, Republicans who received the health frame were not only more supportive of the legislation but

also more willing to pay higher taxes to fund it (see Figure 3). Framing hunger as an economic issue, by contrast, was wholly ineffective.

The experimental results do not shed much light on why the health frame is especially effective with Republicans. We speculate that it helps Republicans, who have lower levels of baseline support for food assistance programs, see why these programs are valuable. The health frame connects the need for *nutritious* food (and not merely *enough* food) to another basic need: health.

The following excerpt models how to frame hunger around health:

> "Hunger is a health issue; it affects people's physical and mental health in serious ways. Strengthening food assistance programs will ensure that all Americans have the nutrition they need to be healthy and well."

To recap: When communicating to Republicans, frame hunger around the issue of health to increase support for target policies.

Democrats begin with very high baseline levels of support for food assistance programs, and they already want to address the issue of reducing hunger. For this reason, it is unnecessary to employ an alternative issue frame for communicating about hunger with Democrats. The survey experiment found that simply providing basic information about the prevalence of hunger in the United States and pointing to the urgency of addressing this problem increased Democrats' willingness to pay higher taxes to fund legislation to reduce hunger. When Democrats are given information about the problem and necessary solutions, they are likely to support expanding existing food programs. Experimental results indicate that framing hunger as a health or economic issue can, in fact, backfire with Democrats and *depress* support for relevant policies. Communicators, of course, cannot always neatly target communications, so they should only use a health frame when they know their audience is largely Republican.

To recap: When communicating to Democrats, provide information about the prevalence of hunger in the United States and make a clear policy ask.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

Explain and emphasize how food assistance programs can be improved and strengthened.

By and large, members of the public know of many existing programs that help people get food. All interview participants mentioned "Food Stamps" before they were asked about them (though the term "SNAP" was much less frequently recognized). Many also brought up WIC, free school lunches, and local charities. All participants had some knowledge of how food banks and food pantries work.

Because people evaluate information about existing food programs with the *Adequate Help* model, communicators should be sure to explain that existing programs *do* have significant positive impacts on hunger in America but *do not* sufficiently address the problem. Discussions of programs that already exist should be accompanied by explanations of necessary expansions and improvements.

Communicators should not hesitate to state policy asks boldly. The tested messages advanced arguments for ambitious legislation that included doubling food assistance and found that, when framed in the right way, these messages gained traction. Ambitious proposals also communicate clearly to the public that existing programs are not remotely sufficient. Staking out the need for major reforms communicates the scope of the current problem.

Conclusion

The research described here shows the power and potential of telling a new story about hunger in the United States. If stakeholders within the sector unite around, share, and amplify the strategies outlined here, they will change the public discussion about hunger and food insecurity, boost support for policy solutions, and increase public engagement with these issues. A reframing initiative will fundamentally shift how the public thinks about hunger and food insecurity and advance efforts to create a country in which all people can easily access and afford nutritious food.

Appendix A: Public Understandings of Hunger

Before designing communications on a complex issue like hunger in America, it is helpful to anticipate how and why communications might go awry. When strong conceptual models are at odds with research and evidence, advocates need strategies that can shift perspectives and allow people to adopt new ways of thinking. A systematic assessment of where and how public thinking differs from expert consensus is therefore an important resource for setting communications priorities, designing a strategy to meet those priorities, and selecting framing tactics.

The research presented here is distinct from public opinion research based on polls and focus groups, which document surface-level responses to questions. This research focuses not on *how people talk* but on *how they think* about the many intersecting issues involved. It deconstructs the assumptions and thought processes that inform what people say and how they form judgments and opinions. The unit of analysis is *cultural models*—the term anthropologists use to describe shared assumptions and patterns of reasoning[6]—that inform the public's thinking about hunger. We have "named" the cultural models we found through this analysis (e.g., the *Land of Plenty* cultural model) so the concept can be referenced throughout the report.

Understanding how the public thinks about hunger and related issues will help communications professionals anticipate how the public will interpret information about hunger in America. Armed with this knowledge, advocates can better frame their messages to increase understanding and engagement and decrease disengagement and unproductive or counterproductive thinking.

Appendix B: Which frame "works"? That's an empirical question.

To arrive at a set of framing tools and tactics that advocates can use with confidence, FrameWorks designed a series of quantitative experiments that tested the effects of different frame elements on communicating expert perspectives on hunger. The frame elements included different ways of using values, explanatory metaphors, and narratives. To determine the effects of these frames, researchers first created short messages that incorporated one or more frame elements. From a large, nationally representative sample of US residents, a survey experiment randomly assigned participants to different messages and then asked them to complete a survey probing their knowledge, attitudes, and policy preferences about issues around hunger.

Table 1: Desired Communications Outcomes: Improved Knowledge, Attitudes, and Policy Preferences

A frame "works" when it leads to the desired communications outcome. To determine the effects of different frame elements, researchers tested frames head-to-head and looked to see which messages made the most difference on questions like the following:

SCALES	SAMPLE QUESTIONS
Support for Relevant Policies	How much do you favor or oppose doubling funding for food programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as "Food Stamps")? *[7-point Likert scale: "Strongly oppose," "Oppose," "Somewhat oppose," "Neither favor nor oppose," "Somewhat favor," "Favor," "Strongly favor"]*
Attitudes toward SNAP & SNAP Recipients	Most adults who receive SNAP benefits are either working or actively looking for jobs. *[7-point Likert scale: "Strongly Disagree," "Disagree," "Somewhat Disagree," "Neither Agree nor Disagree," "Somewhat Agree," "Agree," "Strongly Agree"]*
Understanding of Systemic Factors in Hunger	Please rank the following explanations for why people face hunger, with the best explanation at the top. People experience hunger because of: a. Lack of personal responsibility b. Poor work ethic c. Lack of knowledge about nutrition d. Inability to get to stores that sell reasonably priced, healthy food e. Lack of good jobs f. High housing costs

Prevalence of Hunger	To your knowledge, how common is hunger in the United States? *[5-point Likert scale: "Not at all common," "Somewhat common," "Moderately common," "Very common," "Extremely common"]*
Consequences of Hunger	In your view, how big of an effect does hunger have on different aspects of American society? Please rank the following options so that the biggest effect of hunger is at the top and the smallest is at the bottom. a. Our country's medical costs b. High school graduation rates c. The productivity of the country's workforce d. Crime rates e. People's motivation to find jobs
Collective Efficacy	How optimistic or pessimistic do you feel that we, as a society, can eliminate hunger in America? *[7-point Likert Scale: "Extremely pessimistic," "Pessimistic," "Somewhat pessimistic," "Neither optimistic nor pessimistic," "Somewhat optimistic," "Optimistic," "Extremely optimistic"]*
Collective Responsibility	In your view, how much of an obligation does our society have to reduce hunger in this country? [7-point Likert scale: *"No obligation at all," "A very small obligation," "A small obligation," "A moderate obligation," "A large obligation," "A very large obligation," "An extremely large obligation"*]
Open-Ended	What do you think are the best ways to reduce hunger in the United States?
Understanding of Poverty	Poverty is caused by the failure of our society to provide enough good jobs. [7-point Likert scale: "Strongly disagree," "Disagree," "Somewhat disagree," "Neither agree nor disagree," "Somewhat agree," "Agree," "Strongly agree"]

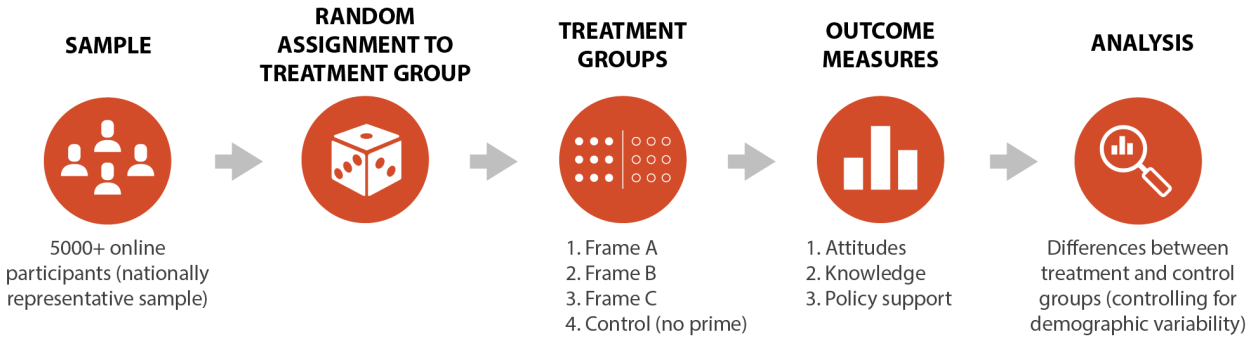
The results associated with each frame were compared with each other and with the responses of a control group, which received only a basic description of the policies of interest and answered the same survey questions. This design allows researchers to pinpoint how exposure to different frames affects people's understanding of and attitudes toward hunger and their support for relevant policies. In addition, researchers controlled for a wide range of demographic variables (including age, ethnicity, education, household income, and gender) by conducting a multiple-regression statistical analysis to ensure that the effects observed were driven by frame elements rather than demographic variations in the sample.

Multiple regression analysis was used to determine whether there were significant differences in responses to questions between the treatment groups and the control group. This statistical technique applies a straight line to the pattern of variables in the analysis. The line is fitted simultaneously across all dimensions of the data. Researchers report the slopes of this line as regression coefficients that chart the

magnitude of each variable's effect; the larger the coefficient, the greater the effect of the value on the outcome measure. Because each treatment variable is scaled to 100 points, the coefficients can be interpreted as percentages.

Multiple regression has a salient advantage as a way to analyze the results of this experimental design. The coefficients are accompanied by a measure of statistical significance that represents the chance that the estimate equals zero. For example, a p-value of 0.05 indicates a 1-in-20 chance that the estimate is zero. Low significance levels—those that indicate a lower likelihood that an estimate is due to chance—increase confidence in the results.

Figure 2: A sound experimental design for determining effective frames



This sound experimental design—a hallmark of Strategic Frame Analysis®—gives researchers confidence that differences between treatment groups are due to frames and not extraneous factors.

About the FrameWorks Institute

The FrameWorks Institute is a think tank that advances the nonprofit sector's communications capacity by framing the public discourse about social problems. Its work is based on Strategic Frame Analysis®, a multi-method, multidisciplinary approach to empirical research. FrameWorks designs, conducts, publishes, explains, and applies communications research to prepare nonprofit organizations to expand their constituency base, build public will, and further public understanding of specific social issues—the environment, government, race, children's issues, and health care, among others. Its work is unique in its breadth, ranging from qualitative, quantitative, and experimental research to applied communications toolkits, eWorkshops, advertising campaigns, FrameChecks®, and in-depth study engagements. In 2015, it was named one of nine organizations worldwide to receive the MacArthur Foundation's Award for Creative & Effective Institutions. Learn more at www.frameworksinstitute.org.

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Hendricks, R., L'Hôte, E., Volmert, A., & O'Neil, M. *Reframing Hunger in America: A FrameWorks Message Brief*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

Endnotes

[1] An Explanatory Metaphor is a simple, concrete, and memorable comparison that quickly and effectively explains an abstract or complex topic.

[2] A nutritious diet includes a variety of foods that contain essential nutrients such as protein, carbohydrates, fat, water, vitamins, and minerals.

[3] For example, earned income tax credits, child care assistance, public health insurance coverage, and housing assistance provide benefits that support people with low incomes.

[4] For a detailed analysis of how race and gender intersect in the conservative myth of the "welfare queen," see, notably, Gilliam, F. Jr. (1999, June). "The 'welfare queen' experiment: How viewers react to images of African-American mothers on welfare," *Nieman Reports*, 53; see also Cammett, A. (2014). "Deadbeat dads & welfare queens: How metaphor shapes poverty law." *Social Justice* 34 (n.d.): 233–265; and see, Gilens, M. (1999). "*Why Americans hate welfare: Race, media, and the politics of antipoverty policy.* Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.

[5] See Nichols, J., Volmert, A., Busso, D., Pineau, M. G., O'Neil, M., & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2018). *Reframing Homelessness in the United Kingdom*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

[6] These patterns are sometimes referred to as "cultural models" or simply "models" throughout this report.