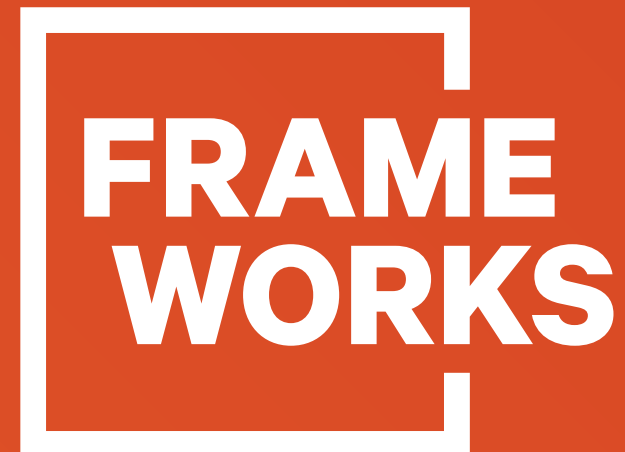


Culture, Cognition, and Communication:

Insights We Can Use for Children's Advocacy

Julie Sweetland, PhD, Senior Advisor



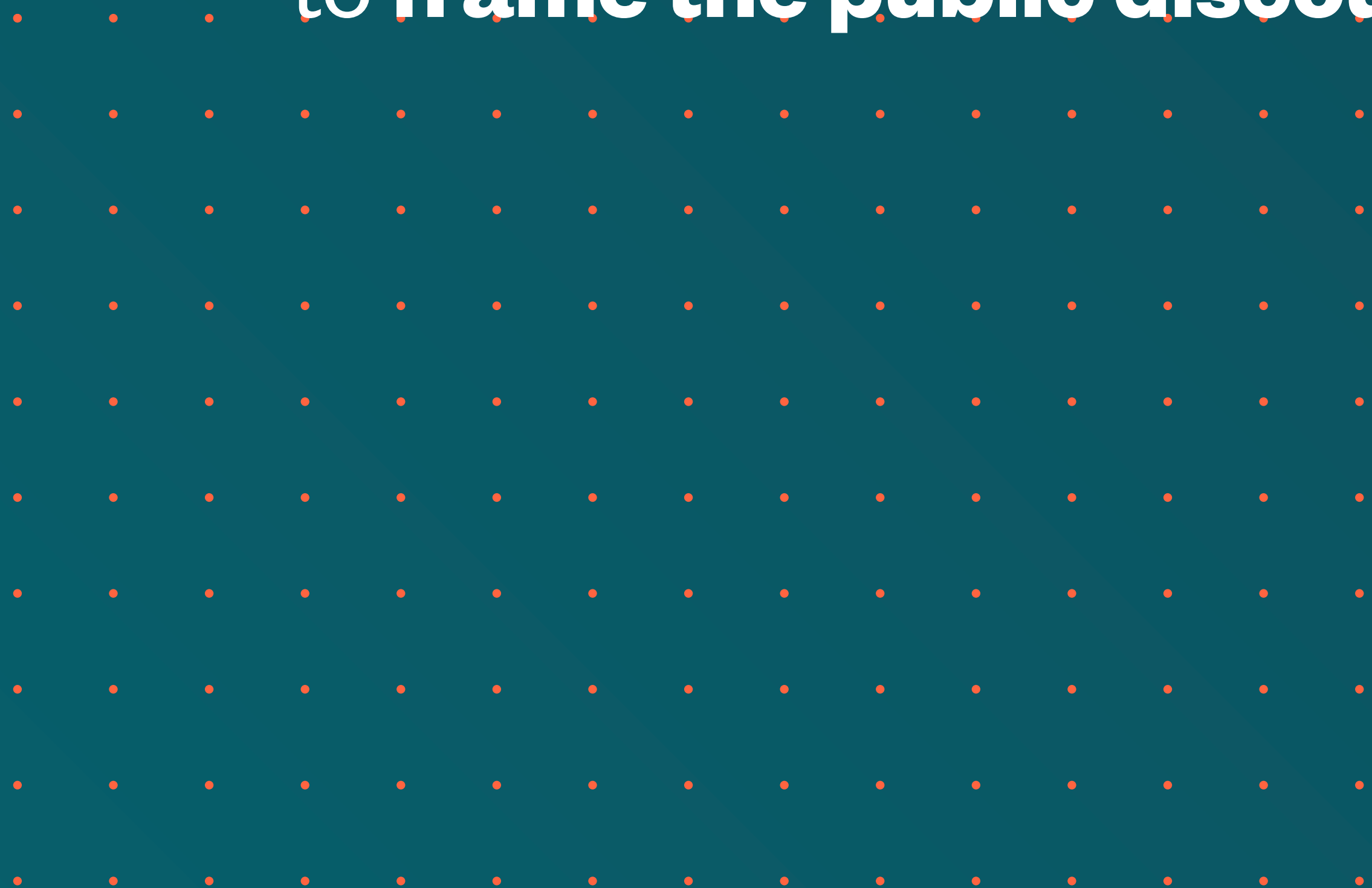
March 11, 2025

Presented at Children's Advocacy Day 2025
Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth

FrameWorks is on a mission...

to advance the nonprofit sector's capacity

to **frame the public discourse** on social and scientific issues



Framing catalyzes change that can be sustained



What we say



What people hear



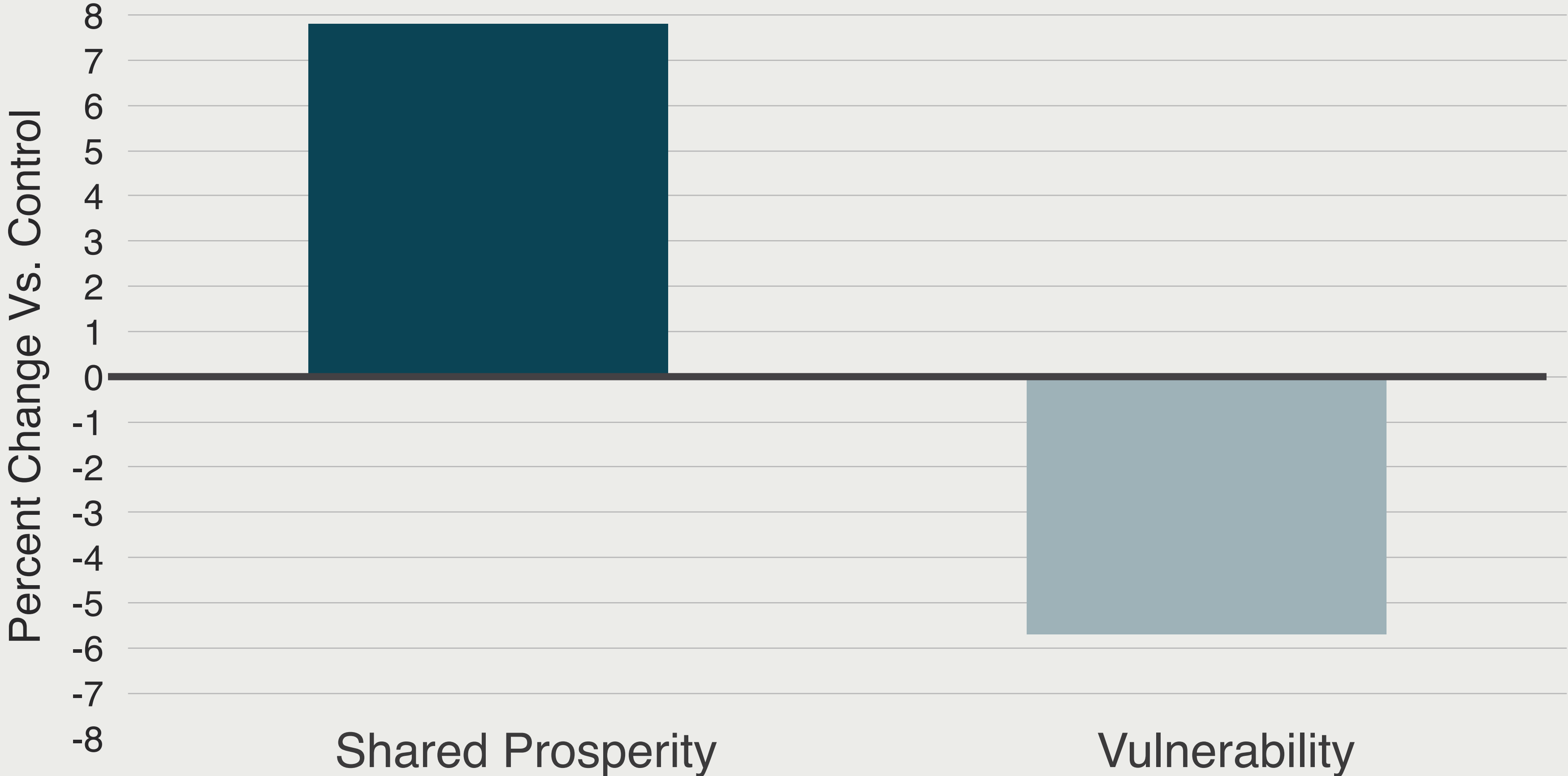
How people think



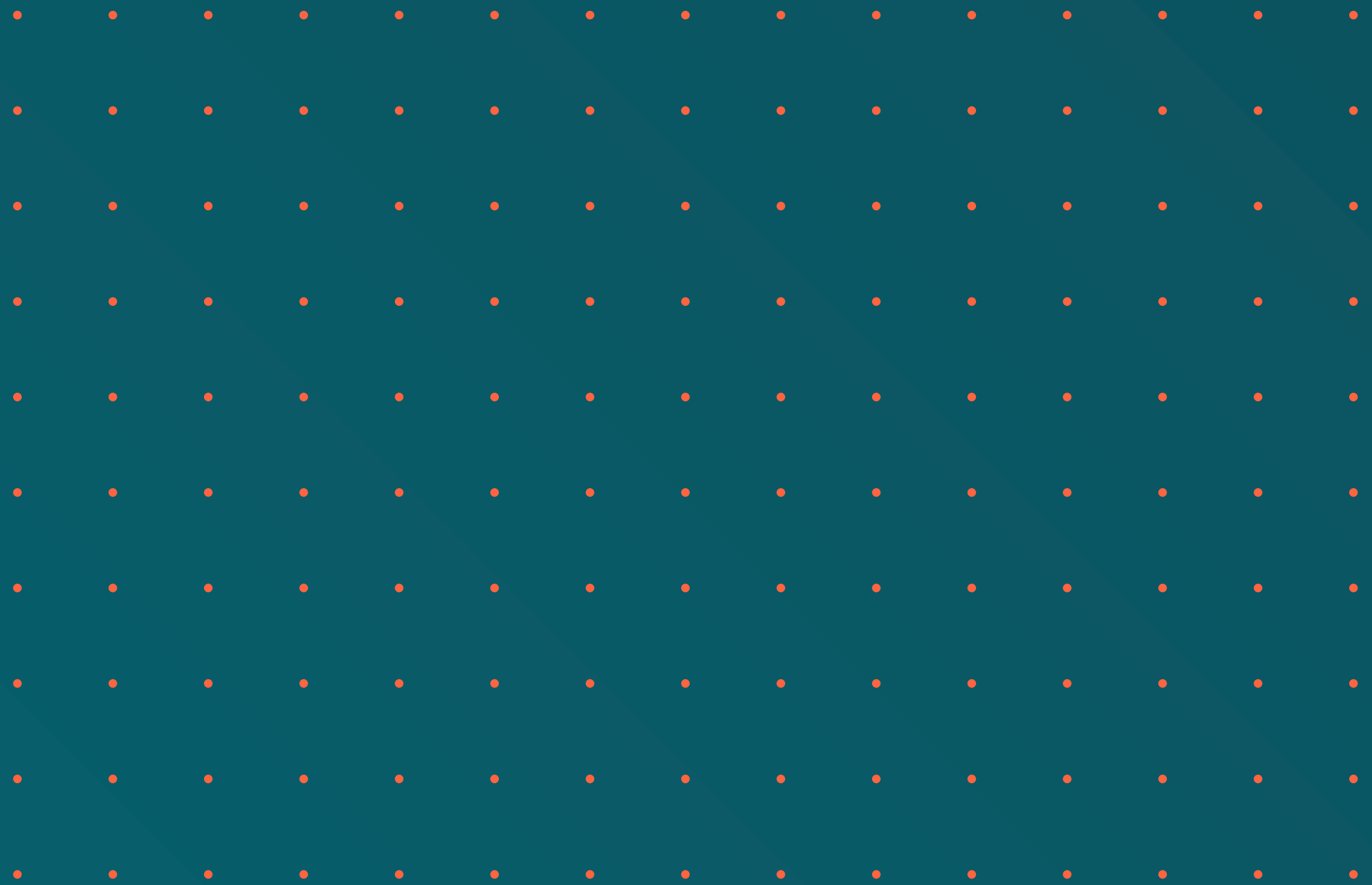
How institutions respond

The way we frame issues can open minds — or close them

Selected results from FrameWorks experiment on framing child mental health



Culture is changing...but how?





FRAMEWORKS
Culture Change
Project

questions

are mindsets changing?

how and for whom?

with what implications?

methods

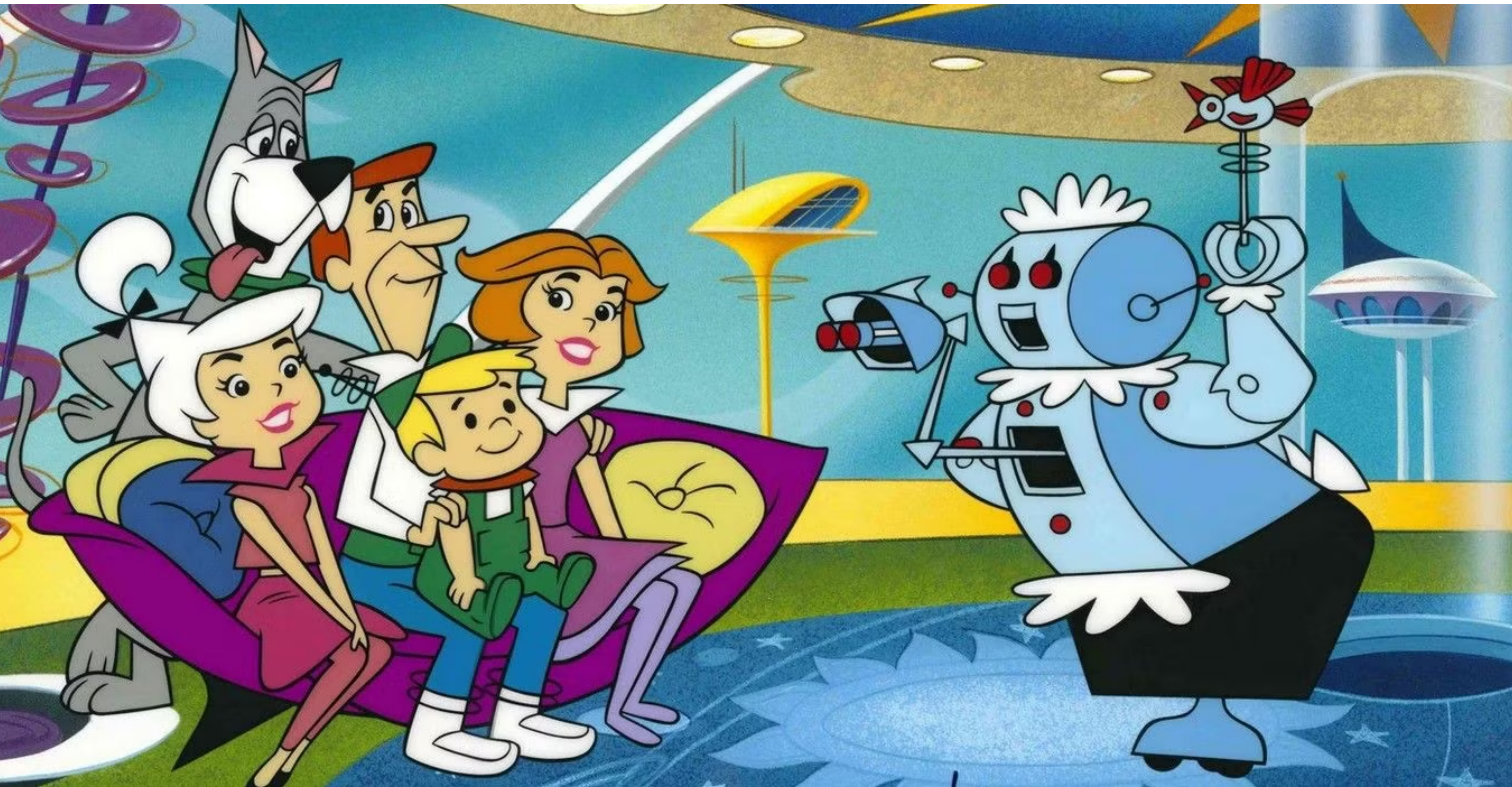
mindset tracking survey

cultural mindset interviews

peer discourse sessions

Americans are deeply dissatisfied with the state of our country—but aren't sure what change should look like.







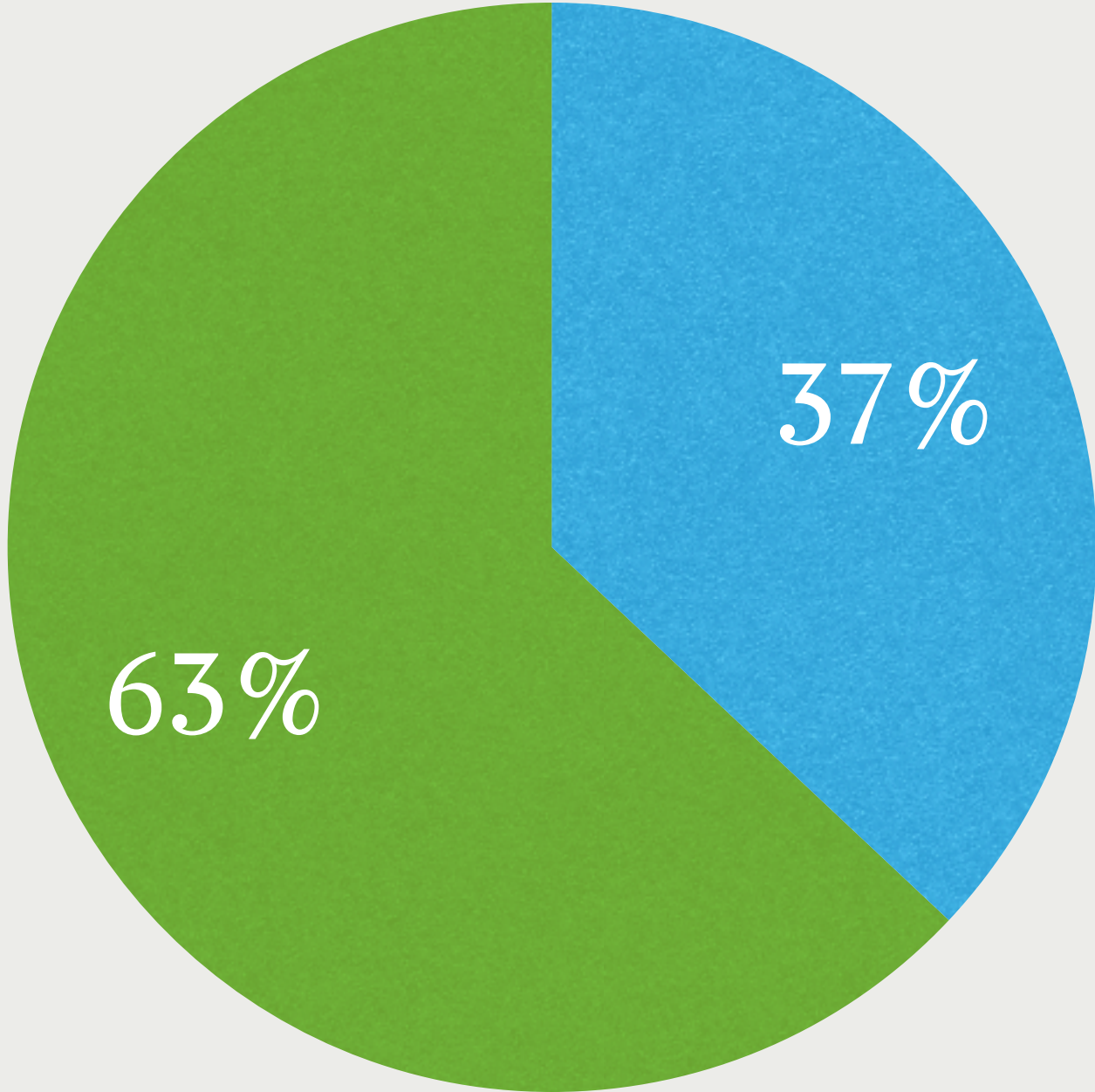
**More than ever before,
Americans are thinking
about economic issues
and outcomes in
systemic terms.**



On the economy, Americans are thinking more systematically

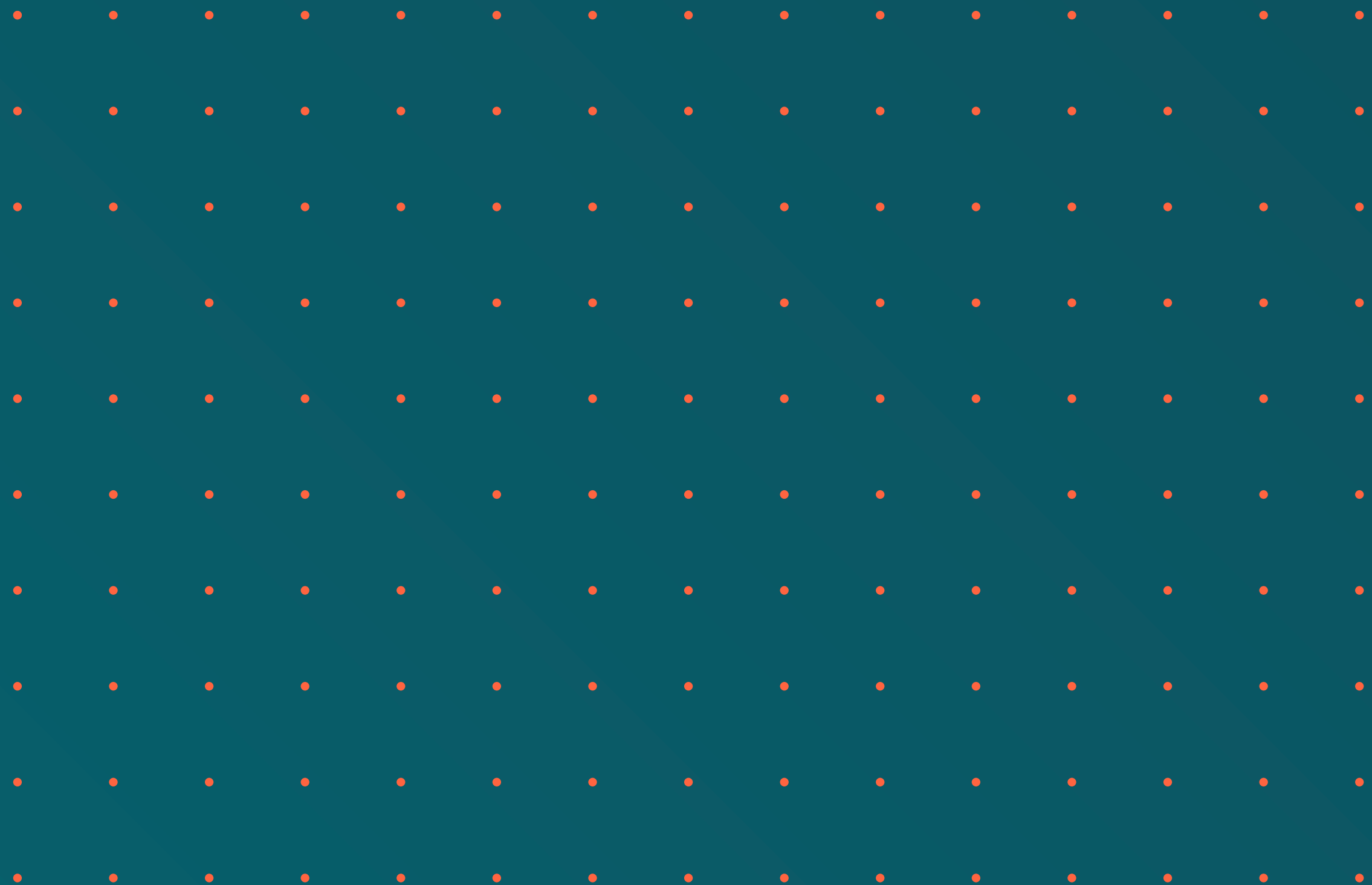
Results from FrameWorks Culture Change Mindsets Tracker

Policies Make Markets
“Policy choices determine how the economy works and who it benefits.”

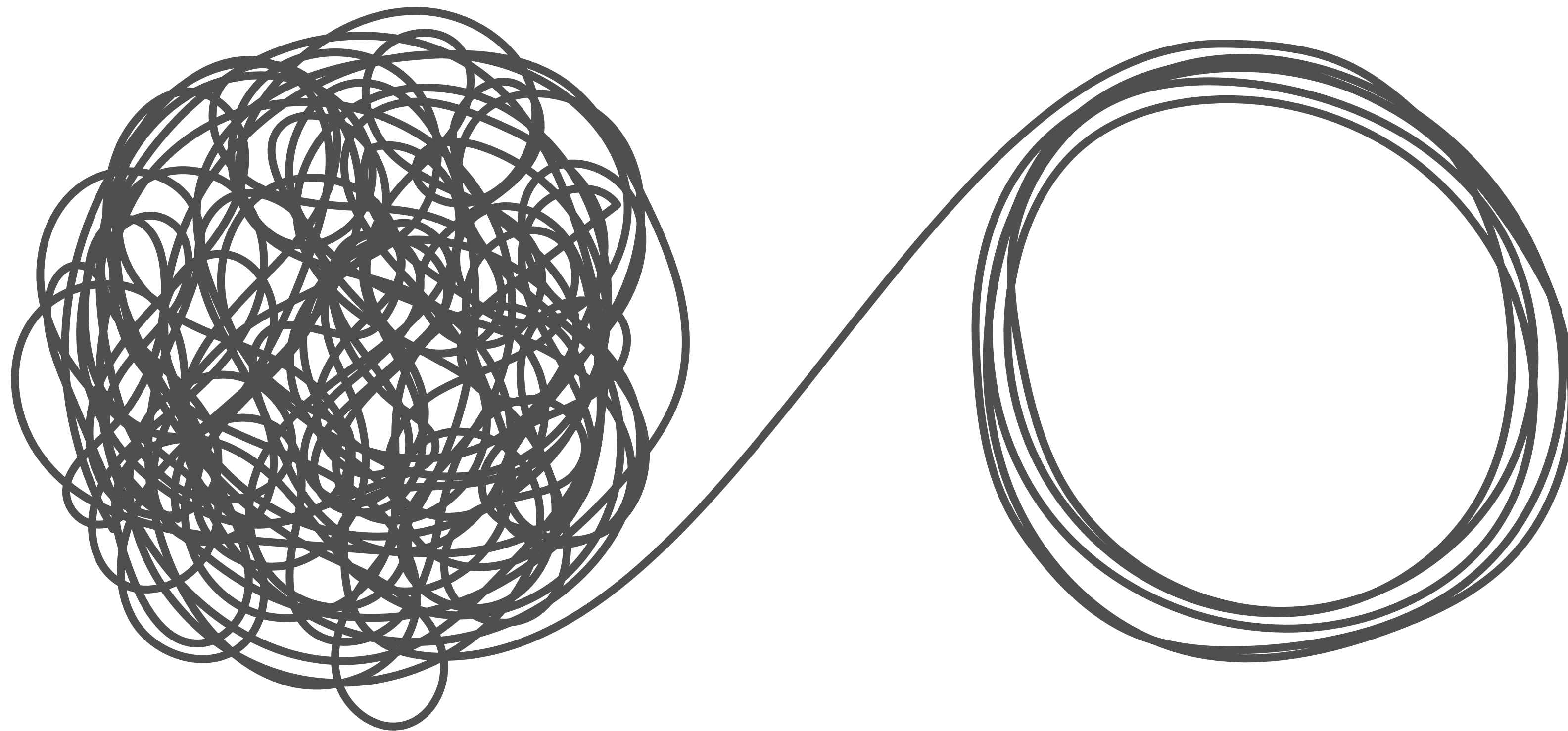


Market Works Naturally
“Who benefits in our economy is determined naturally by the free market.”

How can we make change
in the midst of change?



Framing Now Affects What's Possible Later



Framing =



**Choices in How
We Present Ideas**

**How People
Think / Feel / Act**

**We can — and must —
help people see that a
better future is within
reach.**



Aspirational “end state” framing

“We’re working toward a Tennessee where all children and families are living a purposeful and happy life with hope for the future. In this future, kids get a strong start because we’re supporting women’s health before, during, and after a pregnancy —and good health care is available and affordable for every family. Children’s brains are being built on a sturdy foundation right from the start because we have paid family leave, affordable child care settings that stimulate early exploration, and early learning options like universal preschool and kindergarten, Join us in our mission to create a world where every child can grow up happy, healthy, and safe.”

A positive vision has strong frame effects

- Talking about the “end state” — what society would look like if we made changes — had **strong effects with rural participants** in FrameWorks’ inquiries
- In peer discourse sessions (small group discussions), ***us-vs-them* talk dissipated** when the topic turned to the aspirational end-state
- In a controlled survey experiment, end-state aspirational frames built a sense that we could improve racial inequities and disparities
- (Significantly increased collective efficacy on racial disparities by 10% over the control)

Instead of “terms of art”

By embracing evidence-based, population-level measures at the federal, tribal, state, and local levels, communities can advance a state of health equity where everyone, regardless of factors like race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or geography, has the opportunity to achieve their best health. Health equity also addresses the practices that lead to health inequities, such as poverty, racism, and other forms of oppression.

Paint a picture we can see

There are steps we can take to foster a future of health and wellbeing for everyone in our county. In this future, those of us in the paid workforce can count on jobs that pay well and keep us well through strong workplace safety measures. In this future, we can all find affordable places to live —without the threat of discrimination due to race or income. With more resources and fewer avoidable stresses, our community’s health and wellbeing will flourish.

**We can — and must —
continue to point to
ways we can design our
economy to work for
more of us.**





Fatalism



***We Can
Redesign This***

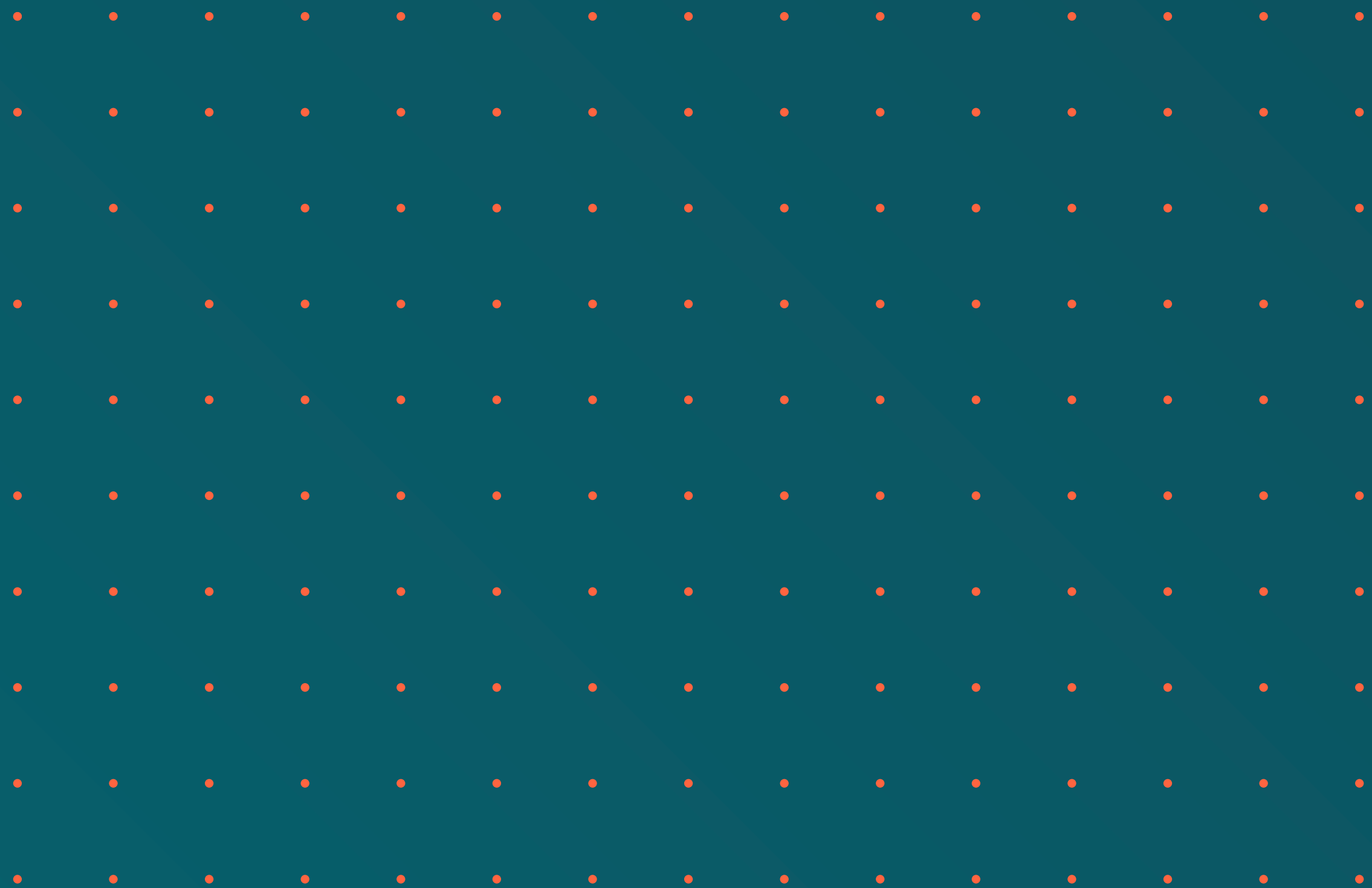
Instead of “the sky is falling”

America is bracing for billions of dollars in cuts to Medicaid, which would end health care for millions of adults and children. The Medicaid cuts would leave the poorest and most vulnerable Americans without access to life-saving medical care. Nursing homes will close. Children with complex medical needs could be cut off from care—and die. All for what? Tax cuts for the rich?

Paint a picture we can see

Medicaid is the way we offer public health insurance when people can't get private insurance through an employer. Medicaid is one way we came together to give more Americans access to health care. 8 of 10 people enrolled in Medicaid rate it highly. There's always room to improve any system, but we can't improve a system that doesn't exist. We need to protect Medicaid.

How can we navigate mindsets on artificial intelligence?



cultural models/mindsets



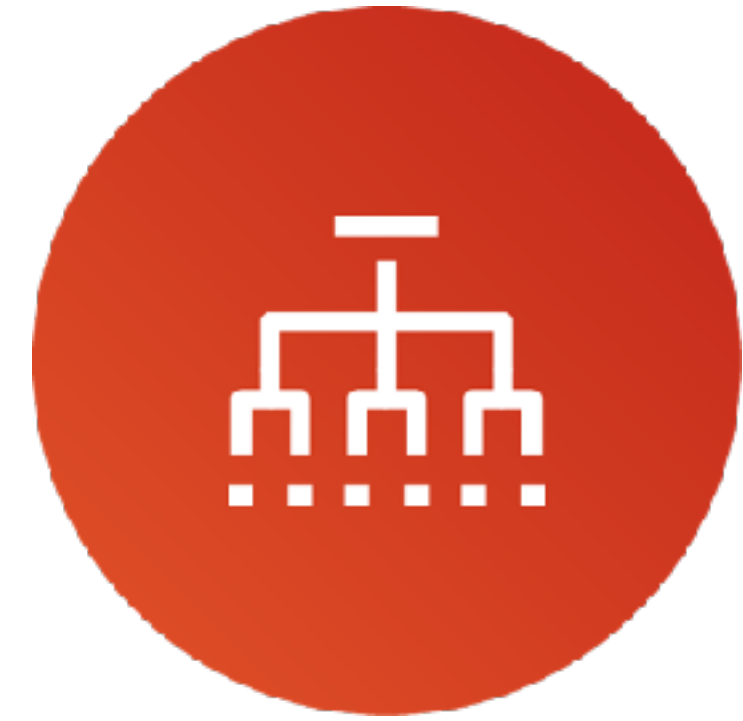
Deep



Widespread

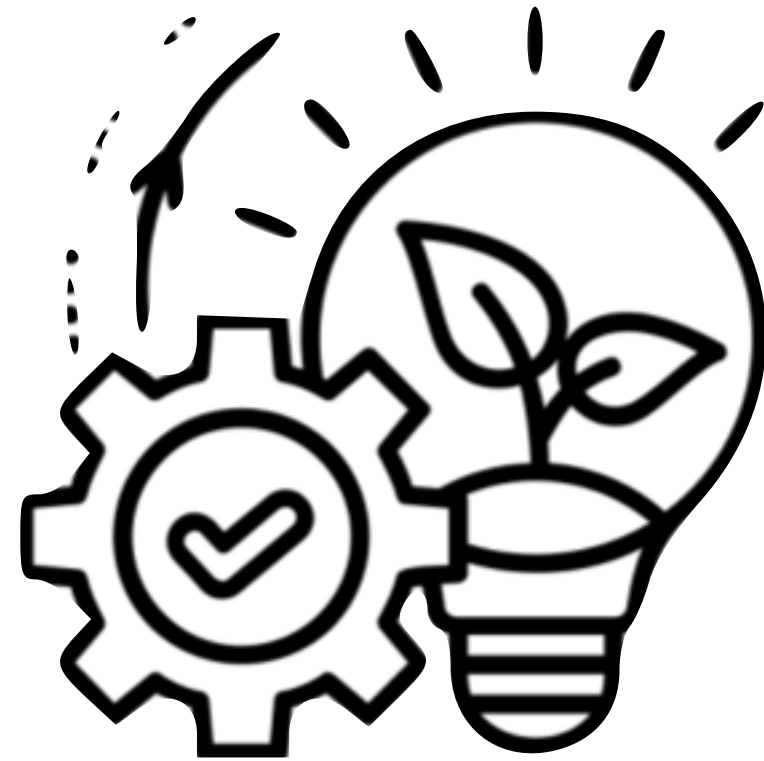


Contextual



Structuring

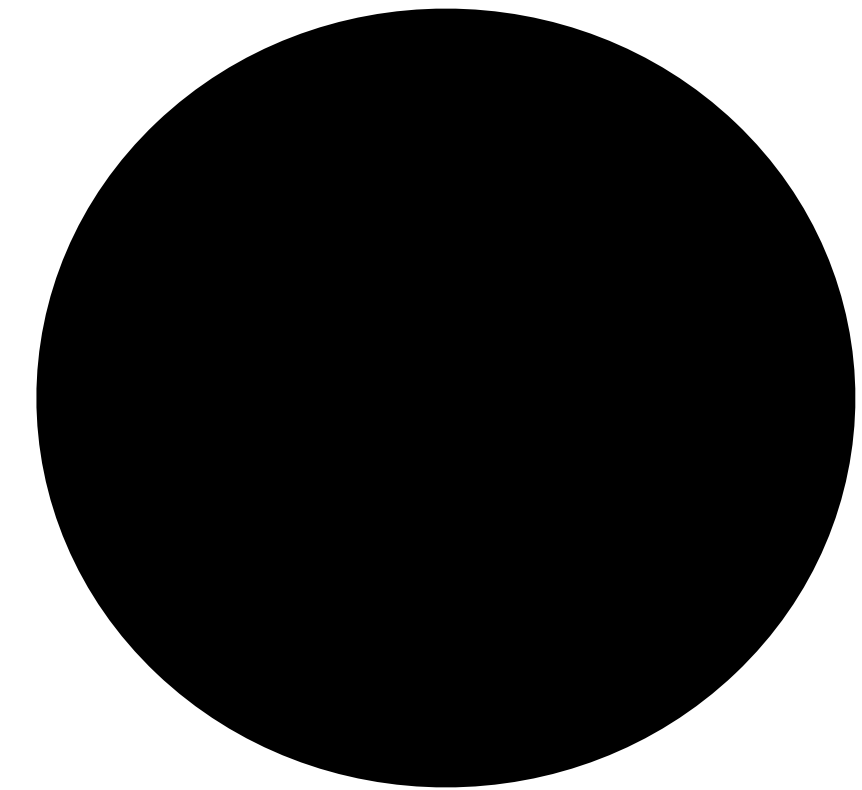
Some patterns in public thinking about AI



All The Innovations



Personal Assistants



Don't See:

Familiar technologies
Built-in algorithms
Government role

To build support for AI guardrails:

- Lead with the problem you’re trying to solve.**
 - Start with impact of bias in child welfare (not the predictive algorithm)
 - Start with need quality health care for patients who speak a language other than English (not the limitations of the AI notetaker)
- Avoid playing into the “Jetsons” frame. Lead with the human-problem solving, then position AI as the amplifier of people’s work.**

To build support for AI guardrails:

- Explain algorithms and frame them as tools that humans create.
 - Talk about algorithms as “rules we build into software.”
 - Explain that the automatic functions are tested and trained on large data sets.
 - Explain the risks: If we aren’t careful at each step, we could be setting up fast, efficient ways *to make things worse*.
 - Give one or two examples of harmful effects if the rules, the tests, or the training aren’t created carefully and fairly. (Don’t go so far that you activate fatalism!)

Instead of “it is what it is”

Our biggest corporations receive more resumes than they can process. Relying on AI helps them screen huge volumes of applicants. The algorithms are faster than people and don't get bored with repetitive tasks. Speed and cost-effectiveness have driven widespread adoption of this new technology.

Try “we made choices”

Many of our biggest corporations have chosen to screen resumes using software powered by AI, which applies programmed rules to sort applications. Managers find the speed and cost-effectiveness appealing, especially if they receive many applications. But there are social costs that we should all understand and weigh.

Use familiar vocabulary to make AI concepts more relatable

Instead of relying on this

Algorithms

Hiring algorithms

Algorithmic models

Machine learning

Try something like this

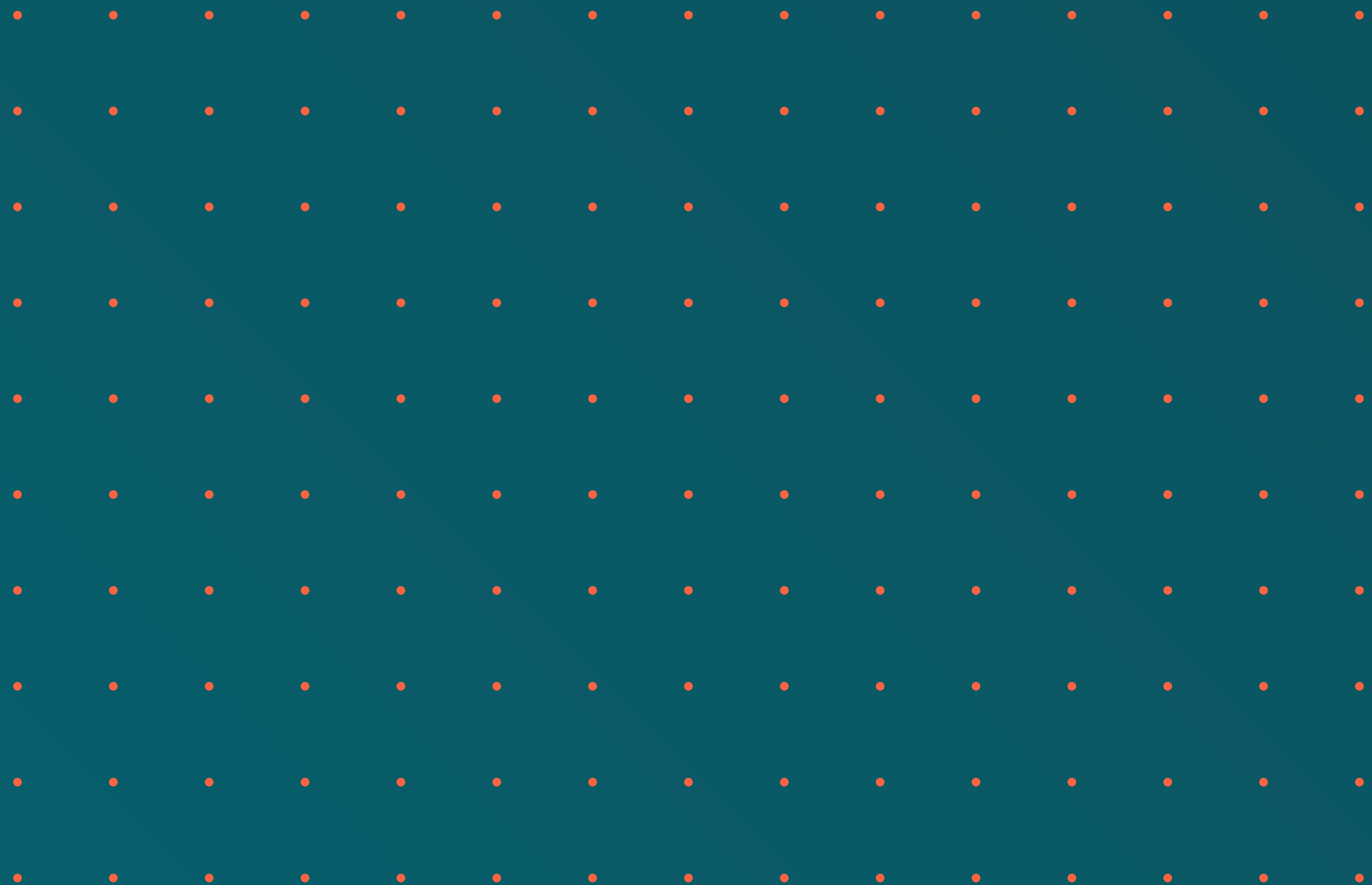
Rules built into software

Software that filters job applications

Computer-generated predictions

Software programmed to adjust automatically over time

Can children's advocates make a difference?



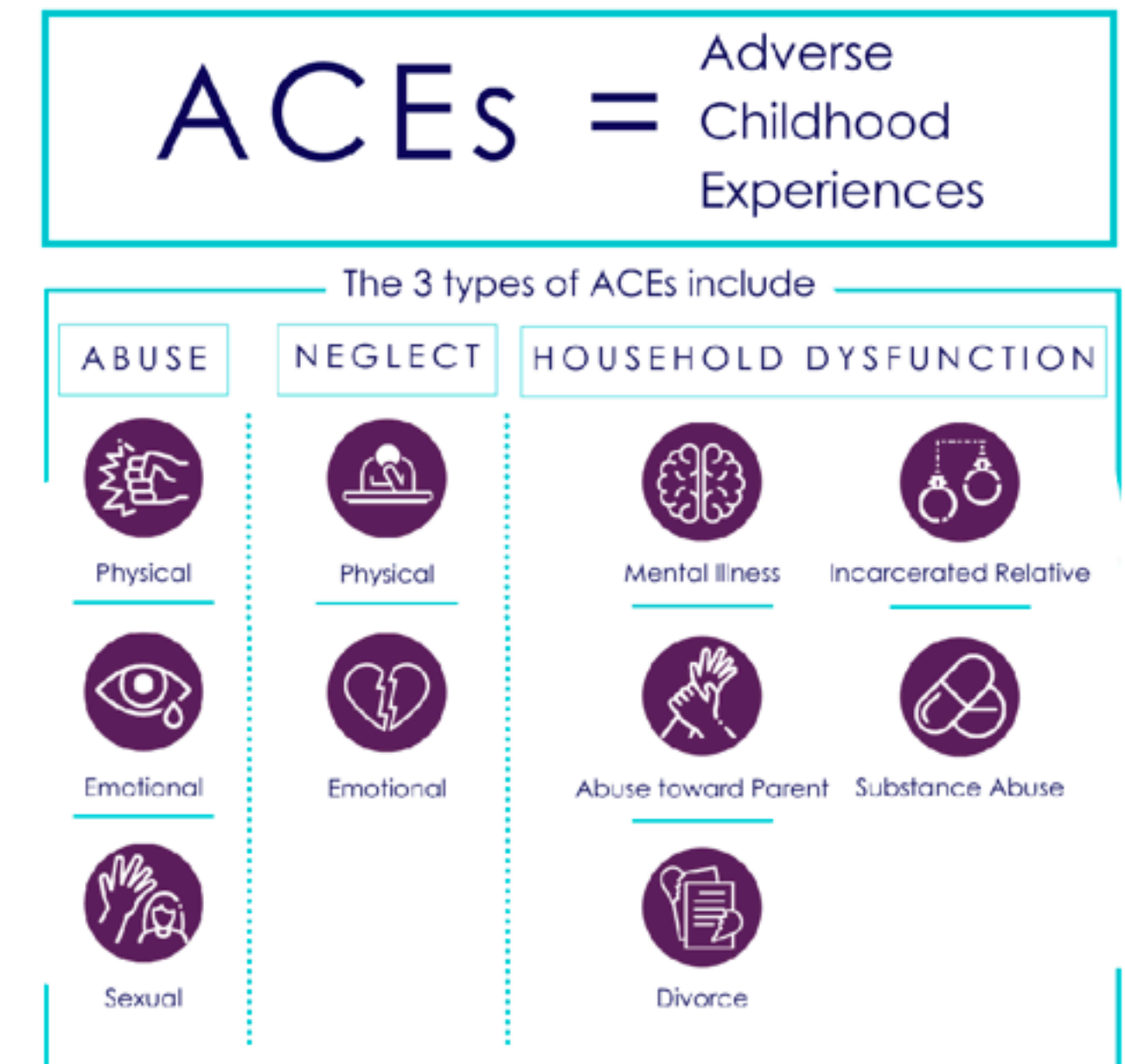
Children's advocates have long used strategic framing for change



A moral issue



An American issue



A public health issue

Policy changes

Successful influence on legislation or other forms of government policies

Societal shifts

Cultural mindsets, public opinion, and social norms have shifted in favor of the cause

Movement Metrics

Institutional changes

New organizations are established or existing institutions change in line with goals

Ongoing activism

The movement continues to thrive and adapts to new challenges

Early childhood movement has moved US mindsets

dominant mindset

Meaningful learning begins when children enter school.

Child development happens inside the “family bubble.”

Negative experiences can “toughen up” a child — and have no effect if they can’t remember them.



target mindset

The earliest stages of life have a profound impact across the lifespan.

Children develop in an environment of relationships and experiences.

Early adversity can disrupt children’s development, unless adults provide timely support.

Consistent framing of early interaction moved mindsets over time

	2002	2011
Percentage of Americans who correctly understood that infants can communicate before they learn to speak	42%	96%

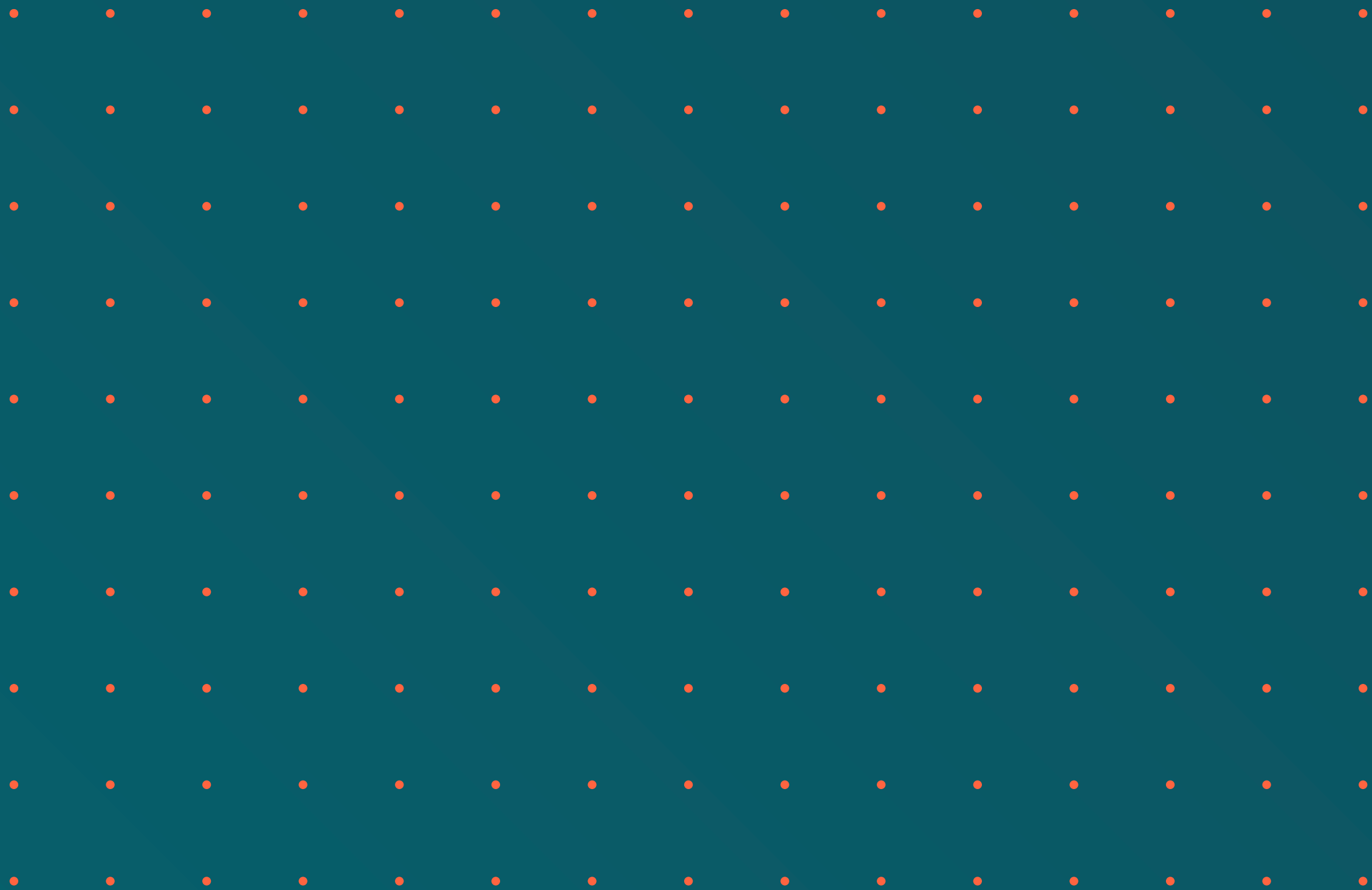
Consistent framing of early adversity moved mindsets over time

	2010	2016
Percentage of US parents who <u>incorrectly</u> believe that infants could not experience feelings such as sadness and fear until after they were 6 months old	69%	51%
Percentage of US parents who know that an infant can sense whether their parents were angry or sad and can be affected by their moods.	44%	54%

Over the longer term, frame effects are larger

	2000	2016
Percentage of US parents of young children who know that a child aged six months or younger can suffer long-term effects from witnessing violence	23%	51%

Concluding thoughts



Can you bring more evidence into your comms?

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@frameworksculture



FrameWorks Institute



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Can you think about audiences more strategically?

Reject your view

Anticipate their arguments

Frame for THEIR audiences

Are open to conversation

Explain, don't 'persuade'

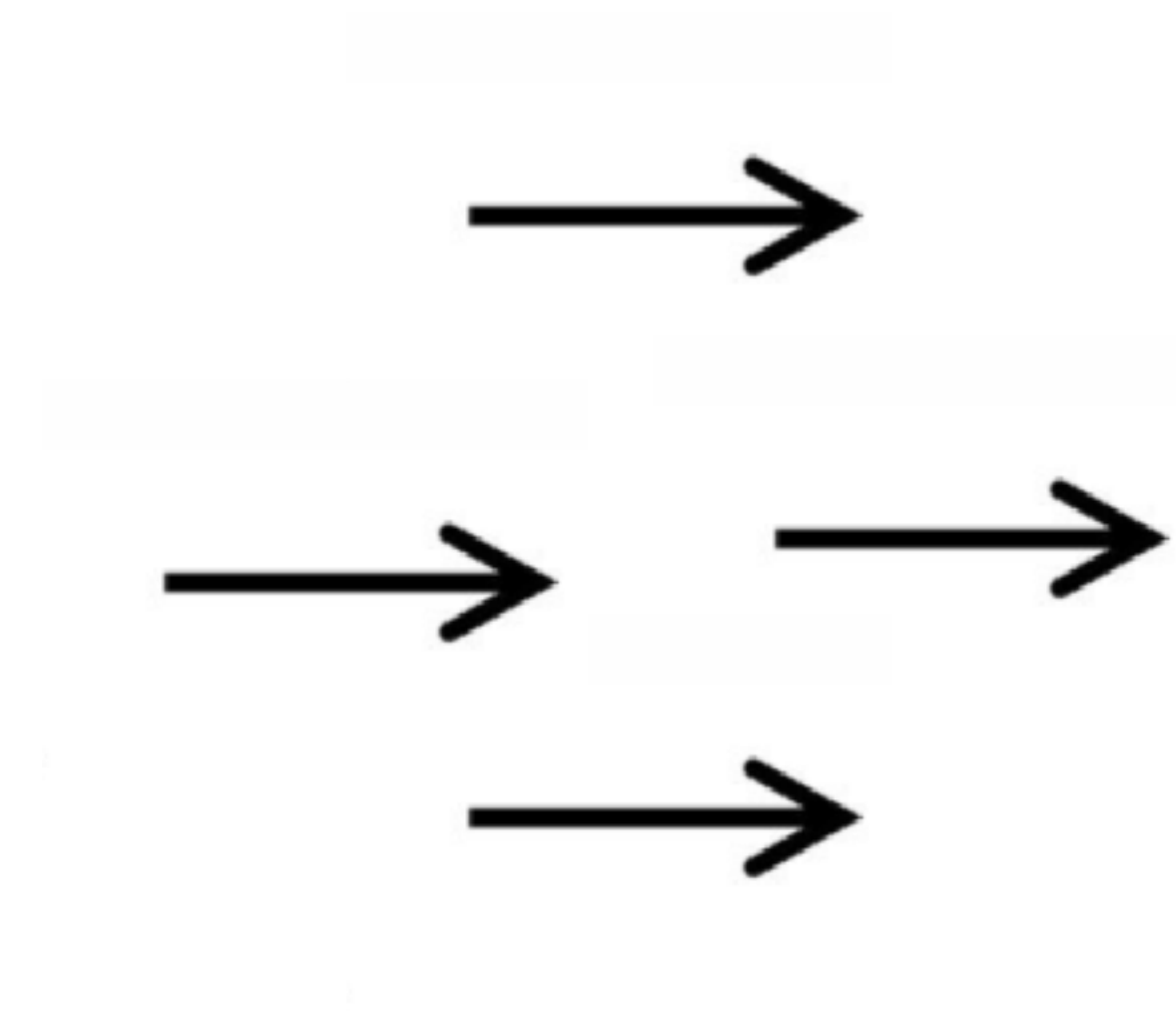
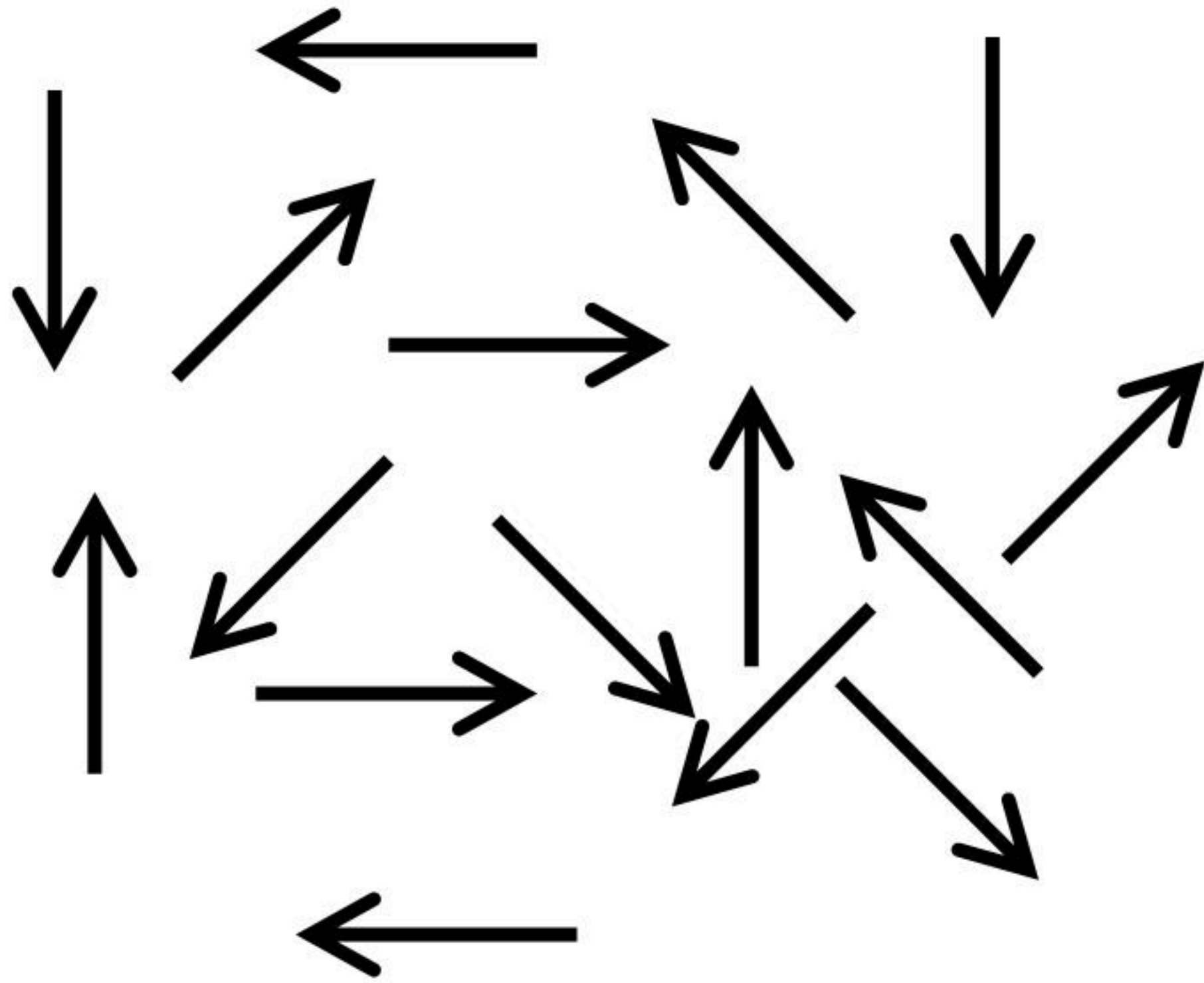
Activate

Support your view

Reinforce

Equip them as fellow framers

Can you concentrate, not dilute, your power?





There is an art to flocking:
staying separate enough to not crowd each other,
aligned enough to maintain a shared direction,
and cohesive enough to always move towards each other...

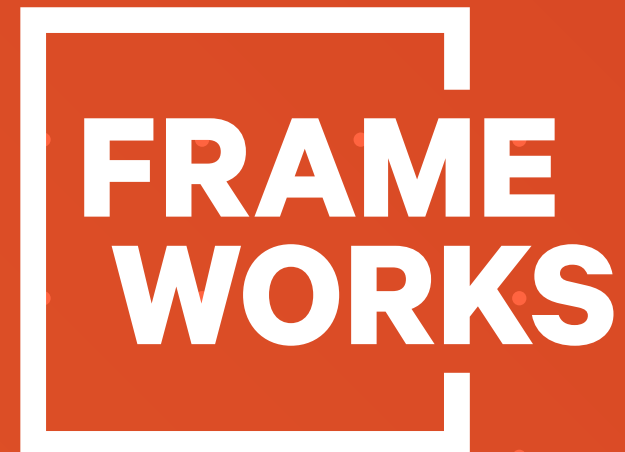


adrienne maree brown
emergent strategy

Reactions? Questions?

Thank you!

Let's continue the conversation.



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About FrameWorks

The FrameWorks Institute is a nonprofit think tank that advances the mission-driven sector's capacity to frame the public discourse about social and scientific issues. The organization's signature approach, Strategic Frame Analysis[®], offers empirical guidance on what to say, how to say it, and what to leave unsaid. FrameWorks designs, conducts, and publishes multi-method, multidisciplinary framing research to prepare experts and advocates to expand their constituencies, to build public will, and to further public understanding. To make sure this research drives social change, FrameWorks supports partners in reframing, through strategic consultation, campaign design, FrameChecks[®], toolkits, online courses, and in-depth learning engagements known as FrameLabs. In 2015, FrameWorks was named one of nine organizations worldwide to receive the MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions.

Learn more at www.frameworksinstitute.org