SOLUTIONS STORYTELLING:

MESSAGING TO MOBILIZE SUPPORT for CHILDREN'S ISSUES

Message Development Research Report

topos

**By the Topos Partnership
For Douglas Gould & Co. and
Child Advocacy 360 Foundation**

May 2010
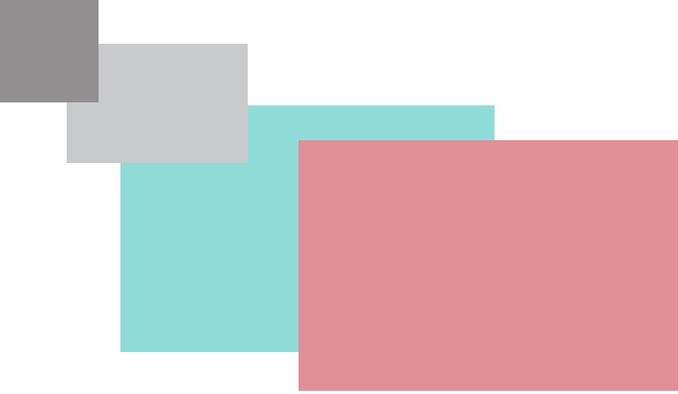
PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Child Advocacy 360 Foundation created the Communications Catalyst Initiative to persuade foundations, affinity groups, corporate benefactors, advocacy organizations and others to support more robust strategic communication programs using the most effective, persuasive messages. Done well, communications can stimulate greater citizen activism and support for programs to improve the lives of all children, and help level the playing field for underserved children.

Many advocacy and direct-service groups are having a positive impact on the lives of children at the local level, yet too many Americans still think "nothing works." Many Americans assign blame for children's problems to "bad" parents and ignore the role of our communities and institutions in creating better opportunities for kids' success. This sense of hopelessness tamps down enthusiasm, and limits fundraising and organizing. The lack of understanding about community links keeps kids' problems in the private realm and lets the public and policymakers off the hook.

The Communications Catalyst Initiative was inspired by the belief that stories about effective programs, or "solutions stories," are an overlooked tool in advocates' toolkit that can educate and mobilize needed support. To test this hypothesis, and to develop effective approaches for telling solutions stories, the Child Advocacy 360 Foundation commissioned Douglas Gould and Company and the Topos Partnership to:

- Interview key child advocacy experts and foundation allies and create an advisory panel for the project.
- Review existing research and gather input from experts about currently used messages and strategies.
- Undertake qualitative and quantitative research to test alternative messages, frames and stories.
- Create communications strategies and advise advocates about effective messages.
- Recruit, train, and deploy a wide range of spokespeople with the knowledge of children's issues and skills to present the message effectively.

The summary is based on research conducted by the Topos Partnership. It was informed by the Communications Catalyst Initiative's goals, and by input from in-depth interviews conducted among key advisors. A memo with strategic recommendation is also available at **www.childadvocacy360.com.**

INTRODUCTION

All across the country organizations are doing great work improving the lives of children and families. Yet too often their stories are not widely known. This research is designed to determine how to tell their stories in ways that expand the impact of their work and compel public interest and support.

Broadly, communications about programs and policies to benefit children can be clustered into two overarching categories. Those that highlight:

1. *particular programs and efforts on behalf of kids, and*
2. *the general idea of taking collective responsibility for children's wellbeing.*

Both are valuable and important areas of emphasis for communications, but each represents different challenges for storytelling. Importantly, our research suggests that the first category (telling stories of particular programs) does not automatically lead people to understanding the second (collective responsibility for children). Therefore, this research addresses ideas for achieving support for particular programs as well as the general idea of taking collective responsibility for kids.

Three central considerations at the heart of the Communications Catalyst Initiative shaped the research:

Change the emphasis from problem to solution.

Stories to promote action on behalf of children often emphasize the problems children face in the belief that awareness of the severity of the problem will compel people to rise up and act. While some do act, many others are overwhelmed by the problem and feel powerless to address the situation. If communicators tell more stories that emphasize solutions, will we see more public support for those solutions?

Make the role of community visible.

People tend to default to a view of children as existing solely in relation to their family – a perspective Topos refers to as the Family Bubble. The Family Bubble[1] perspective constrains people's view to the responsibility of the nuclear family in raising children, and obscures the important role of community and/or government in creating the conditions for healthy development. How do we tell stories that allow people to recognize the role of community and the importance of collective solutions?

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[1] See "Promoting School Readiness and Early Child Development: Findings from Cognitive Elicitations," by Axel Aubrun and Joe Grady, Cultural Logic, March 2002.

Inspire action on behalf of children not one's own, particularly at-risk children.

In part due to the Family Bubble perspective, people are reluctant to intervene on behalf of children other than their own (unless the family dynamic is shockingly dysfunctional or damaging, in which case others have to intervene). They naturally default to thinking of their own children's needs, interests and abilities, even when evaluating their support for broad programs and policies. Strategists often recommend couching solutions in terms of "all children" to gain public support, but in an era of tightening state budgets, at-risk children need priority. Can we tell stories that make action on behalf of children not one's own a natural and expected role for all citizens?

The analysis that follows is based on a significant body of original research, including six focus groups and TalkBack testing among 240 engaged citizens, plus research to measure the effects of various messages on people's support for various policies and interventions to help children. The survey was comprised of a representative sample of 2,006 American voters.
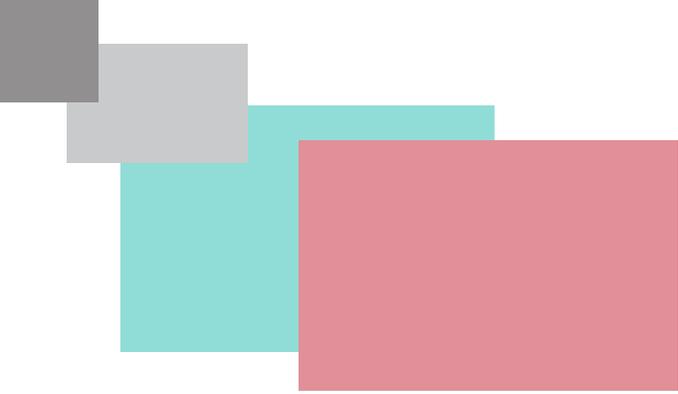
BRIEF RECAP OF FINDINGS

Most news stories on most social issues focus on the problem to be solved, and news about children's issues is no different. On one level, this approach seems sensible. Don't problems spark the desire to find solutions?

This research finds that a focus on problems has some benefits, but can also backfire. Problem-focused stories increase support for government action, but at the same time increase cynicism about the ability of government and citizens to solve these problems. These stories undermine the solution even while raising the need for the solution and make tough problems seem even more intractable.

The "Solutions Story" Alternative

Solutions stories, on the other hand, is an underused communications approach that:

- Lifts the public's desire for collective action without increasing cynicism about the effectiveness of action.
- Increases support for active government and a range of children's policies.
- Leads to support for higher taxes to get higher quality services.
- Lifts support for policies targeted to disadvantaged, at-risk kids.
- Research respondents rate as more interesting, unique, motivating and important – suggesting they will get more attention from the public.

There are times, of course, when a focus on problems is needed. Importantly, this research suggests:

- It is more effective to emphasize causes rather than outcomes.
- It is helpful to define and describe the problem in terms of inadequate systems and structures serving kids, rather than just focusing on the ways kids are suffering or falling behind. Bad outcomes can usually be blamed on parents, but inadequate systems require a public response.

Core Story Elements

Five core story elements rise to the top as being particularly important for telling effective solutions stories. Though presented as five distinct elements, to a large extent these elements overlap, and they all certainly complement each other as demonstrated by the exemplar stories developed by the qualitative research and tested further in the survey experiments.

CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY

People's default reasoning constrains their view of children to the family – parents are responsible for their child's wellbeing and no other actors are immediately visible. To inspire willingness to act on behalf of children not their own, we need to broaden people's view to include the community. That is, we need to remind audiences of how:

- **The whole community benefits** from kids who grow up to be contributing members.
- **The community can have important beneficial influences** on children and families.

BIG PICTURE THINKING

One reason the survey was able to record such strong shifts for the solutions-oriented approach was because the solutions stories focused on the "big picture" which allows people to see the broader generalizations about the value of intervention. This

research uncovered two effective approaches for keeping people focused on the big picture:

- **Listing a number of solutions:** When they hear about a particular kid, community or program, people naturally tend to focus on the narrow particulars of that story, missing broader implications. Briefly discussing a number of very different programs is one straightforward way of focusing less on a particular case study, and more on the general principle that we can and should be taking greater collective responsibility for kids' wellbeing.
- **Public Structures:** To promote an appreciation of policy's role in creating better outcomes for kids, it is helpful to talk about how we all rely on "public structures" (systems and institutions we build for our collective wellbeing, from libraries to court systems to publicly regulated utilities). This idea gives people a more concrete picture of how we create a better and stronger community.

NECESSARY, NOT JUST NICE

In the current economic climate, programs that are "nice to have" are not likely to garner widespread support. Therefore, communicators must position key programs as necessary. One way to communicate necessity is to remind people of kids' connection to community – the community benefits from kids who grow up to be productive adults. Another effective approach that is overlooked in most communications efforts is a focus on how a particular solution works. When people have a concrete picture of how a program helps, they are more likely to see it as important.

INSPIRING ACTION

Demonstrating quantifiable movement in behavior is a tough test for any communications effort, and this subject is no different. However, in the qualitative research participants often voiced strong interest in engaging in direct action after reading solutions-oriented stories.

While all the elements combine to spark interest, the qualitative research suggests that communicators should specifically incorporate model examples of the behavior we want to encourage. This includes not just individual, extraordinary "heroes", but the collective actions of responsible citizens as well. Modeling behavior helps people visualize the ways they could make a difference.

"PROVING" EFFECTIVENESS

While one might think that proving the effectiveness of a particular solution is the most essential and difficult story element, it turns out that people's standard of "proof" usually isn't particularly high, as long as they have a sense of how an intervention helps. Two parallel solutions tracks in the survey, one with "hard" statistical evidence of success, and the other with anecdotal support, had generally the same positive effects. If hard statistical proof is available, it can be used, but communicators shouldn't hold back on telling solutions stories for lack of statistically significant evidence.

Summing Up

The three Topos founders – Meg Bostrom, Joe Grady and Axel Aubrun – have been researching public understanding of children's issues for two decades. Their earlier research into specific children's topics such as early childhood development, child abuse and perceptions of teenagers, informed the

research questions on this topic. This research is unique, however, in two fundamental ways. First, it refines a systemic set of principles to apply to stories *across children's issues*. Furthermore, it employed a unique form of survey research that quantified the *influence of these principles of storytelling* on public understanding, action and support, rather than simply rely on respondents' self-reports of a message's ability to persuade.

The analysis that follows is based on a significant body of original research, including six focus groups, TalkBack testing among 240 engaged citizens and survey research with a representative sample of 2,006 American registered voters. The research was designed to establish the effects of various stories and story elements on people's support for policies and interventions to help children.

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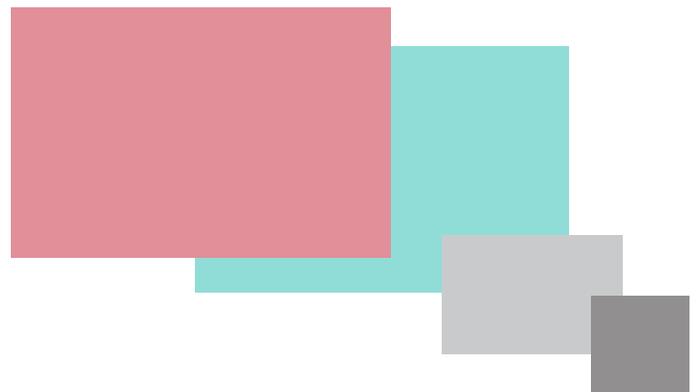
METHODOLOGY

The project included several components designed to approach the key questions from a variety of angles.

Focus Groups

Focus Groups are group conversations, typically conducted with 6-10 people over the course of two hours. Topos uses focus groups to determine that a public discussion using new messages is both viable and effective at shifting perspectives. Focus groups approximate a "public" conversation that includes the ebb and flow of support and opposition, understanding and confusion, that is likely to emerge in real world conversations. In this way, the researchers determine the communications elements that are necessary for a robust public conversation.

A total of six focus group sessions were conducted:
- Marleton, NJ (June 2, 2009)
- Indianapolis, IN (October 21, 2009)
- Braintree, MA (November 4, 2009)

All focus group participants were screened to meet an engaged citizen profile, meaning they are registered to vote, read the newspaper frequently, and are involved in community organizations. Engaged citizens are frequently the opinion leaders in their circles, so patterns in discussion among these individuals are especially salient to understanding the public conversation. The groups were divided by child status: half the groups were comprised of parents of children under 18 years old (quotes noted as "mother" or "father" throughout) and half were comprised of those without children under 18 – some without children and some with adult children (quotes noted as "woman" or "man" throughout). Otherwise, participants represented a mix of gender, race, age, and education.

TalkBack Testing

In the TalkBack method – developed by Topos principals Axel Aubrun and Joe Grady – subjects are presented with brief texts (roughly 80-150 words) and then asked several open-ended questions, at least one of which focuses on their ability *to repeat the core of the message, or pass it along to others.* The testing is designed to assess whether a given idea has the capacity to become an organizing principle for thinking and communicating about the issue: Can people remember it, do they focus on it, can they talk about it? It also looks at whether people who have heard a particular message successfully avoid key "traps" (e.g. the default tendency to focus on parents' "exclusive" role), and take more constructive perspectives.

In each case, subjects read the brief statement and were then asked a variety of questions concerning their understanding of the text's main point, what they could remember about it, whether they agreed and why, how would they respond to someone with a different viewpoint and so forth. Testing involved working with a diverse group of roughly 240 participants from around the country.

Online Survey

The survey analysis is based on online interviews with 2,006 registered voters nationwide, conducted February 12 – March 6, 2010. This survey was designed to determine existing perceptions of collective responsibility for children and to quantify the effects of different kinds of stories in building support for acting collectively on behalf of children. To meet these dual objectives, the survey incorporated a series of experiments to determine the extent to which exposure to different kinds of stories subsequently influenced reasoning and attitudes.

Specifically, survey respondents were randomly assigned to either a control group or one of three test groups. Those in the test groups were exposed to news stories and questions intended to predispose a particular way of thinking. Interviewees in both the control and test groups responded to the same set of core questions about children, children's policy and the role of communities and government. By comparing the responses of those exposed to test language with the responses of a control group (not exposed to any test language), we can determine the relative ability of stories to shape public understanding.

Unless otherwise noted, only statistically significant shifts are highlighted in this analysis. The effects of these types of experiments are typically subtle. Dominant models of understanding are developed throughout the course of our lives, and changing those models takes repeated exposure to new frames. A short survey of this type provides understanding, but will not fully represent the more significant shifts in public opinion that might occur over a long period of exposure to new frames.

For more details about the survey, please see the Appendix.

The following analysis begins with a review of current public perceptions, based solely on the responses of the control group (the group uninfluenced by the effects of the framing experiments). An analysis of the effects of the frame and the effects on different target audiences follows. Finally, the paper ends with an extended discussion of the kinds of story elements that are effective in creating an engaged and supportive public.

THE CURRENT STATE OF OPINION

Before outlining a strategy to *change* opinion, we need to identify the *current* state of opinion and the dynamics that could influence communicators' success.

As noted in the Introduction, one primary task for this effort is to make visible the very important role of community in helping to raise happy, healthy children who become productive citizens. In some ways, a conversation about collective action is very challenging in the current environment, while in other ways Americans are well positioned for this conversation.

As we typically see in our research, people's first reaction to "government" tends to be negative -- they default to a view in which government does too much and has a negative impact on most people's lives. In considering government budgets, their initial reaction is frequently firmly anti-tax.

However, when we can get beyond these initial knee-jerk reactions, we find that Americans do support a number of government actions for children, they believe in the value of collective action and the common good, they believe citizenship requires certain obligations, and they even support taxes when reminded of the relationship between resources and quality public services.

Ultimately, the relevant question is not whether Americans do or don't support children's policies, but whether we can shape public discourse in such a way to allow the right predispositions to come to the surface.

Government, Budgets, and Taxes

People's first reaction to "government" tends to be negative. Our research on government suggests this is largely due to people's top-of-mind association with bickering politicians and gridlock in Washington, causing them to conclude that government is irrelevant, or perhaps even has a negative impact on people's lives. Furthermore, in the wake of bank bailouts and other major initiatives, Americans are increasingly worried the government is trying to do too much. Most conclude that government should concentrate more on cutting budgets rather than raising taxes in these tough economic times. There are strong differences in opinion among different segments of the population, with Democrats, African-Americans, women, younger and more educated voters feeling more positive about government, while Republicans, men, older and less educated voters feel more negative.

IF COMMUNICATIONS DOES NOT OVERCOME THE INITIAL, NEGATIVE ASSESSMENT OF GOVERNMENT, ADVOCATES WILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO BUILD PUBLIC WILL FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION.

When asked what impact the government has on most people's lives, only 36% say "positive" while a majority (57%) says "negative," a -21 point margin. When specifically considering the impact of government on most children's lives, people are negative, though less so (42% positive, 46% negative, a -4 point margin). Reactions differ by party identification with Democrats holding a positive view of government (+10 point margin for government generally, +24 point margin for children) and Independents (-26, -9) and Republicans (-57, -34) holding negative views. Older men and men without a college education hold particularly negative views of government while younger and college-educated men, and women are more positive.

In addition, a majority of voters think "government is doing too many things that should be left to individuals and business" (59%, 49% strong), while fewer side with the view that "government should do more to solve problems" (41%, 29% strong), a -18 point margin. Democrats would like to see government do more (+34 point margin), while Independents and Republicans believe government is already doing too much (-35 and -72 point margins respectively). There is also a strong divide by age, with older voters, particularly older men, believing government is doing too much.

Forced to choose between two actions state governments can take to balance their budgets, two thirds believe state government should concentrate more on "cutting projects and services" (67%, 50% strong), while only one-third would "raise revenues through taxes" (33%, 18% strong), a -34 point margin. While no demographic group has plurality support for increased taxes, Democrats (-2 point margin) and younger men (-20) are less opposed to raising taxes than Independents (-35), Republicans (-68) and older men (-50).

However, it is possible to flip two-thirds support for cutting government services to two-thirds support for higher taxes.

The "taxes versus services" tradeoff may cause survey respondents to imagine that there are unnecessary services that could be cut with no consequences. However, when considering the quality of public services and systems generally (which may allow people to imagine the public structures on which they rely) people are far more willing to pay higher taxes for higher quality services than lower taxes even if it meant low quality public services and systems. Even Republicans, the most tax sensitive group, support high taxes for high-quality services.

GOVERNMENT IMPACT ON LIVES
What kind of impact does government have on most people's/children's lives:

POSITIVE 36 / 42

NEGATIVE 57 / 46

NO EFFECT/DK 6 / 12

☐ PEOPLE'S LIVES ■ CHILDREN'S LIVES
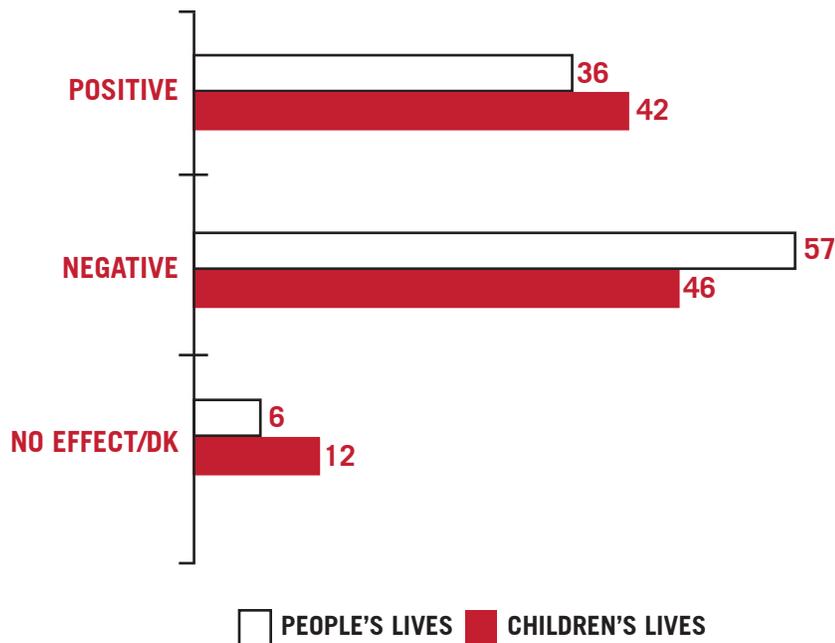
This suggests there is an important role for communications in shining a light on the kinds of quality services that make a difference.

When people consider the relationship between the taxes they pay and the quality of services they receive, two-thirds (69%) would rather pay higher taxes and have higher quality public services and systems, while just 31% would rather have lower taxes even if it meant low quality public services and systems. There are stark divisions by gender on this measure: older women support higher taxes by a 55 point margin while older men support higher taxes by a 19 point margin; women without a college education support higher taxes by a 50 point margin, while their male counterparts have just a 20 point margin. While Democrats support higher taxes by a 61-point margin, even Republicans say they would support high taxes for high-quality services by a 13-point margin.

TAXES AND QUALITY
Closer to your view?
I would rather pay higher taxes and have high quality
public services and systems.
OR
I would rather pay lower taxes even if it means low quality
public services and systems.

	STRONG	NOT STRONG	
LOWER TAXES	22	9	**31%**
HIGHER TAXES	45	24	**69%**

☐ STRONG ■ NOT STRONG
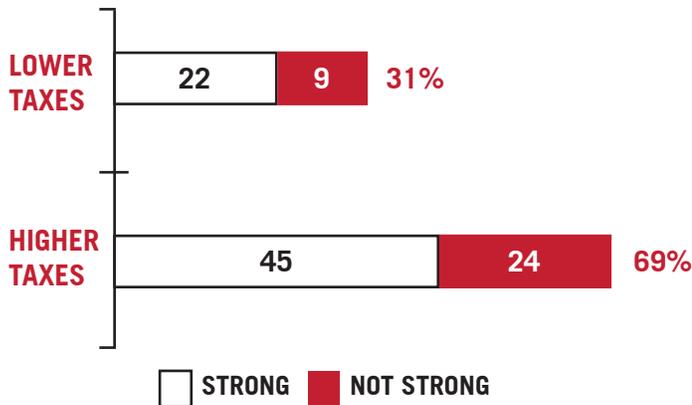
When services for children are added to the mix, one third would cut all government programs and services equally (31%), 15% would pay more in taxes if it went to programs for kids, 25% would pay more in taxes if it went to programs for disadvantaged, at-risk kids, and 29% reject all three choices. African Americans (59%), Democrats (36%), and younger women (32%) are particularly interested in helping disadvantaged children.

DON'T ASSUME PEOPLE WILL AUTOMATICALLY SUPPORT GOVERNMENT ACTION OR HIGHER TAXES FOR KIDS. ASSERTING A NEED ISN'T ENOUGH; REMIND PEOPLE OF THE QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES AND SYSTEMS THAT MATTER, THAT SOLVE PROBLEMS.

Worldviews

A majority of Americans say they value community over individuality, and the common good over self-reliance. Though media coverage of discord and gridlock in Congress might cause one to feel Americans have become disillusioned, this survey demonstrates most

Americans continue to believe in the power of collective action. Interestingly, those voters who tend to discount collective action and the value of community are the same voters who firmly believe in the obligations of citizenship – perhaps an opening for engagement.

ADVOCATES SHOULD GROUND THEIR CONVERSATIONS IN COMMUNITY AND COMMON GOOD (RATHER THAN SYMPATHY FOR CHILDREN) AND THE POWER OF PEOPLE WORKING TOGETHER FOR CHANGE TO ENGAGE THE PUBLIC IN SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S ISSUES.

Americans value community and the common good. Overall, 64% side with the view "the best way to solve the problems we face is by emphasizing shared interests and supporting the common good" while only 36% choose the competing view "the best way to solve the problems we face is by emphasizing self-reliance and supporting individual independence," a 28-percentage point margin.

Similarly, 60% side with the view "the principle of a strong community is most important. America is most successful when we pursue policies that expand opportunity and create a rising prosperity for all, not just a few." Only 40% side with the alternate view, "the principle of self-reliance is most important. America is most successful when we have a limited public role that keeps taxes low so that businesses and individuals can prosper."

In both instances, support for the common good over self-reliance differs by party identification with Democrats and Independents siding with community and Republicans siding with individualism.
In addition, Americans continue to believe in the

power of collective action. Fully 79% say "people working together as a group" can make "a great deal" (45%) or "a lot of difference" (34%) in solving the problems they see. Those demographic groups with the most belief in collective action include African-Americans (61% "great deal of difference"), lower income voters (56%), and those who live in the South (53%). Midwest voters (33%) and Republican voters (37%) are far less likely to believe people working together can make a great deal of difference.

PERCEPTION OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

How much difference do you believe that people working together as a group can make in solving the problems you see?

A GREAT DEAL	45
A LOT	34
SOME	16
A LITTLE	3
NO DIFFERENCE	1
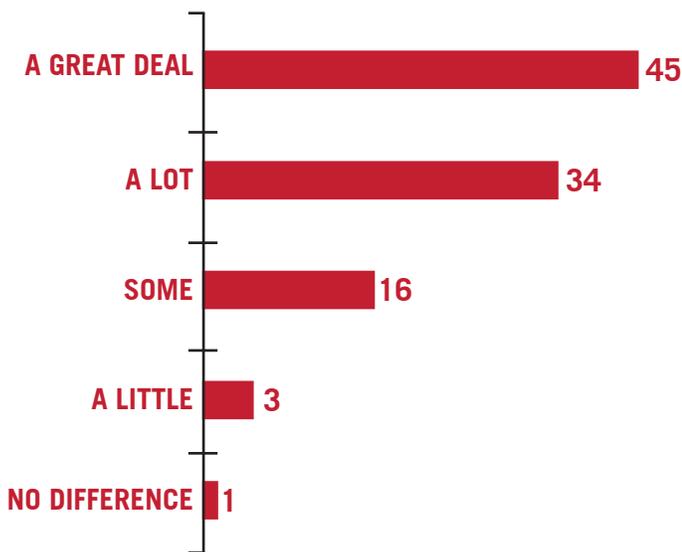
Furthermore, most believe "citizenship" is not just an empty descriptor, it requires special responsibilities. More than two thirds (69%) believe "being a good citizen means having some special obligations" while just 31% side with the alternate view: "simply being a good person is enough to make someone a good citizen" – a 38 point margin. The obligations of citizenship have particular resonance among older voters (a 66-point margin among senior citizens), college-

educated voters (57 points), and those who live in the Midwest (53 points) - voters that do not tend to believe in collective action or government problem-solving. One question for advocates is how to draw on this sense of obligation to engage these voters who are otherwise less supportive of collective action.

Though they ascribe to the *concept* of citizen obligations, actual *participation* revolves around just a few activities. Survey respondents are most likely to report that they plan to vote in elections in the next year or so (an average rating of 9.3 on a 10 point scale, 89% rate 8-10 on a 10 points scale), followed by keeping informed about issues facing children (7.3, 54%), donating to an organization that works for children (7.0, 48%), and volunteering in the community (6.9, 45%). Fewer report being very likely to sign an online petition about children's issues (6.4, 40%), forward interesting articles about children's issues (6.2, 39%), or participate in town hall or community decision-making meetings (5.3, 22%). Generally, women, those with children under 18 years old, and African-Americans are most likely to report high levels of engagement in these activities. As would be expected, older voters and Republicans are particularly likely to say they plan to vote, while Democrats are more likely than voters overall to say they will sign an online petition.

LIKELY TO TAKE ACTION IN NEXT YEAR

% Choosing 8-10 on 10-Point Scale

|	
VOTE	89
KEEP INFORMED	54
DONATE	48
VOLUNTEER	45
SIGN AN ONLINE PETITION	40
FORWARD ARTICLES	39
PARTICIPATE IN TOWN HALL	22
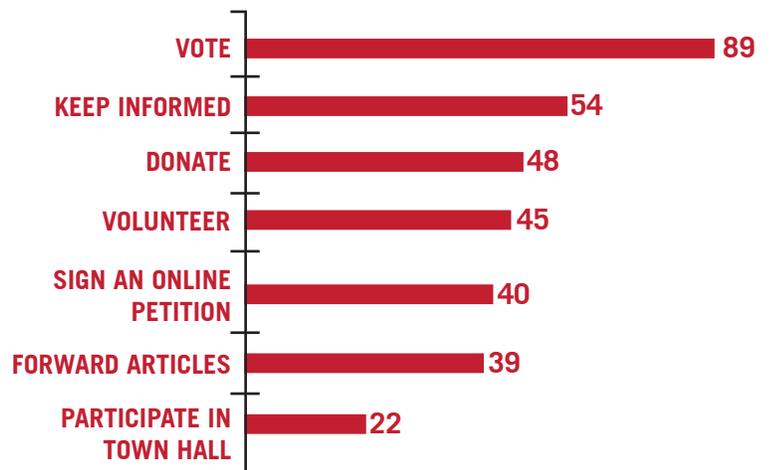
Policy Priorities

Finally, Americans support a number of policy priorities for kids. They tend to prioritize policies for "all children" over policies for "disadvantaged, at-risk children," but, as will be shown later in this report, communications can close the gap.

There is widespread support for prioritizing certain kinds of community investments such as "public efforts for children such as education, after school, and health services" (an average rating of 8.4 points on a 10-point scale, 61% rate 9 or 10 on a 10 point scale). In addition, more people want to "invest in communities" (7.9 average rating on a 10-point scale, though only 41% feel very strongly about this with a rating of 9 or 10) than "reduce government budgets (7.0 average, though a majority 53% feel strongly).

Across these priorities, certain demographic groups tend to show higher levels of support: Democrats, women, especially younger women and college-educated women, younger voters, and African American voters.

Additionally, voters support a number of policy priorities for children. Education and health care are particularly high priorities. In each instance where voters were given an opportunity to rate providing a policy to all children or to disadvantaged, at-risk children, universal services are a higher priority. (see Table)

The most enthusiastic supporters of these policies are Democrats, African-Americans, women, and lower income voters.

ISSUE PRIORITIES
% 9-10 on 10-points

Issue	%
INCREASE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES	66
	59
MAKE QUALITY EARLY EDUCATION AVAILABLE TO ALL CHILDREN	58
MAKE AFFORDABLE HEALTH INSURANCE AVAILABLE FOR LOW INCOME CHILDREN	53
IMPROVE FOSTER CARE AND CHILD CARE PROTECTIVE SERVICES	49
SHRINK GOVERNMENT BUDGETS	49
MAKE QUALITY EARLY EDUCATION AVAILABLE TO DISADVANTAGED, AT-RISK CHILDREN	47
CUT TAXES	42
EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR QUALITY AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS	41
MAKE CONSEQUENCES MORE SEVERE THE FIRST TIME A KID GETS IN TROUBLE	27

EMPHASIZING SOLUTIONS

Solutions Stories Get Attention

Often, communicators assume the way to build public support for policy change is to emphasize a crisis. If the public is worried enough, they assume, people will rise up and demand a solution. Of course there is an important role for communicating problems, but too often the solutions are invisible or seem inadequate to the scale of the problem and people are left feeling helpless.

People are harshly critical of current media practices and react negatively to the prominence of the Crisis Frame in most news coverage.

"" **I FEEL LIKE YOU'VE BEEN SLAPPED 37 TIMES; THE 38TH ONE DOESN'T MAKE MUCH DIFFERENCE. YOU GET HIT WITH SO MANY THINGS LIKE THIS THAT IT PROBABLY WOULDN'T STIR UP TO SOMETHING IT SHOULD. THERE'S A LOT OF THAT STUFF [STORIES ABOUT CRISES] IN THE NEWS.**
-Massachusetts man

I AM KIND OF GETTING FED UP WITH THE DOOM AND GLOOM THAT IS ACROSS THE BOARD. AND I'M REALLY LOOKING FOR THE AMERICAN WAY OF HOW WE PULL TOGETHER AND HOW WE MAKE IT WORK

IN SPITE OF WHAT IT IS. IF IT MEANS FORMING COALITIONS OF DOCTORS AND CREATING COMMUNITY CLINICS -- SOMETHING THAT IS POSITIVE. IT'S JUST NOT THIS. I'M TIRED OF THIS DOOM AND GLOOM AT THE END OF THE SENTENCE, PERIOD. THAT'S NOT WHAT WE'RE ABOUT AS AMERICANS.
*-New Jersey woman*

BECAUSE I THINK OUR SOCIETY FOCUSES ON THE NEGATIVE AND IT BREEDS ON THAT. IT KEEPS US -- TO KEEP THE TURMOIL IN OUR SOULS GOING. YOU TURN ON THE TV AND THAT IS ALL YOU HEAR. THE FIRST 15 MINUTES OF THE NEWS IS WHO HAS BEEN KILLED, AND WHY THEY DID IT, AND HOW THE BODIES WERE FOUND. I DON'T WATCH THE NEWS.
-Indiana woman

In contrast, stories about solutions, particularly successful solutions, have the potential to fill an unmet need and gain quite a bit of public attention. Survey respondents who read one of the solutions-oriented news stories were significantly more likely than those who read the problem-oriented story to rate the stories as interesting, unique, motivating, and important. While survey respondents are equally likely across versions to indicate they will search for more information (ranging from 50%-56% "likely), or forward the article to a friend (ranging from 47%-51% likely), the positive reactions suggest that solutions-oriented stories are more likely to be read and get widespread attention.

COMPARED TO MOST STORIES, THIS IS MORE...
First Story Stories

	SOLUTIONS SOFT	SOLUTIONS HARD	PROBLEM - OUTCOMES
INTERESTING	44	51	43
UNIQUE	31	36	20
MOTIVATING	45	48	26
IMPORTANT	53	58	52
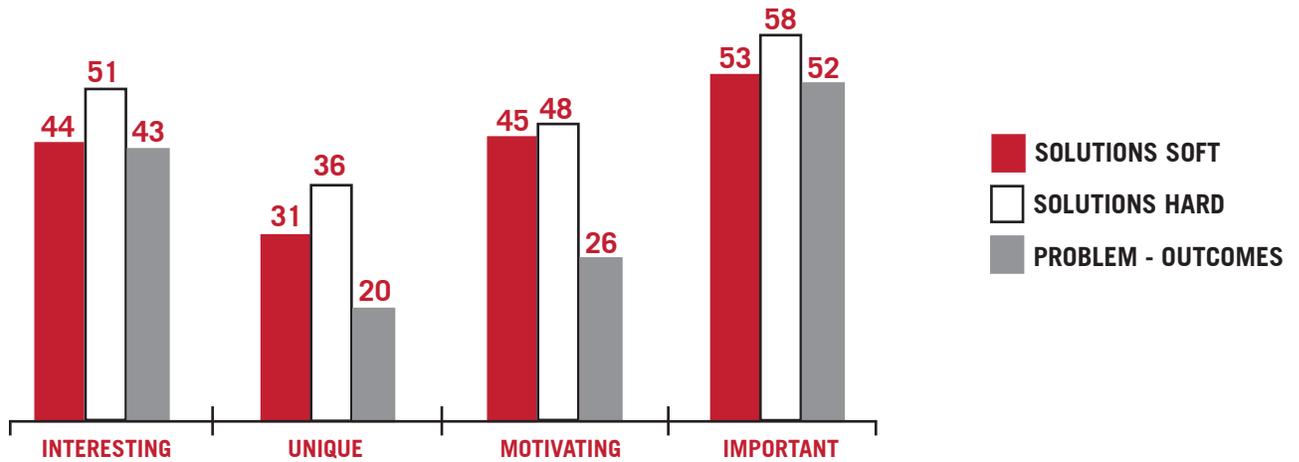
COMPARED TO MOST STORIES, THIS IS MORE...
Second Story Stories

	SOLUTIONS SOFT	SOLUTIONS HARD	PROBLEM - OUTCOMES
INTERESTING	56	56	47
UNIQUE	40	42	22
MOTIVATING	48	50	37
IMPORTANT	62	62	60
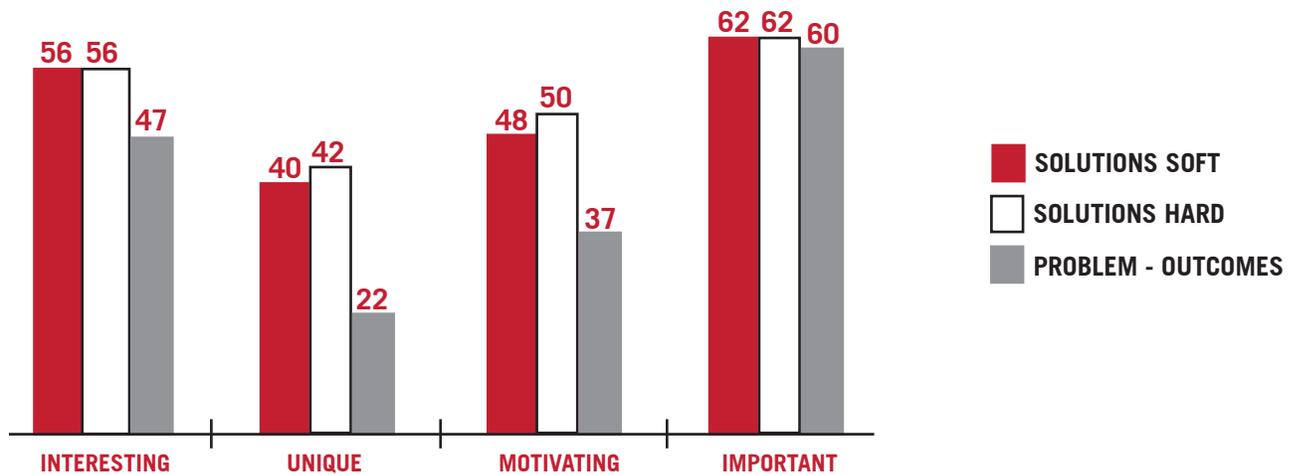
THIS PATTERN SUGGESTS THE PUBLIC WILL BE MORE LIKELY TO PAY ATTENTION TO STORIES WITH A SOLUTIONS ORIENTATION – THESE STORIES WILL BE SEEN AS NEW AND UNIQUE AND PERHAPS GIVE ADVOCATES' COMMUNICATIONS MORE TRACTION.

Solutions Stories Increase Support For Investment

*In the current economic climate, Americans are nervous both about government budget deficits and about raising taxes. The survey demonstrates that all three stories dampen enthusiasm for **reducing** government budgets, and a solutions orientation increases support for investing in communities and having high taxes for high quality services. These findings suggest that in this tough economic climate, people can be convinced of the need to maintain government budgets, but they need to understand how their tax dollars will be put to good use, not simply told that there is a problem.*

### INVESTMENT SHIFTS BY STORY APPROACH
%9 or 10 on 10-Point Scale

INVEST IN COMMUNITIES: CONTROL 41, SOLUTIONS SOFT 48, SOLUTIONS HARD 49, PROBLEM 44

REDUCE GOVERNMENT BUDGETS: CONTROL 53, SOLUTIONS SOFT 40, SOLUTIONS HARD 43, PROBLEM 42

SUPPORT PUBLIC EFFORTS FOR CHILDREN SUCH AS...: CONTROL 61, SOLUTIONS SOFT 62, SOLUTIONS HARD 59, PROBLEM 56

Legend:
- CONTROL
- SOLUTIONS SOFT
- SOLUTIONS HARD
- PROBLEM
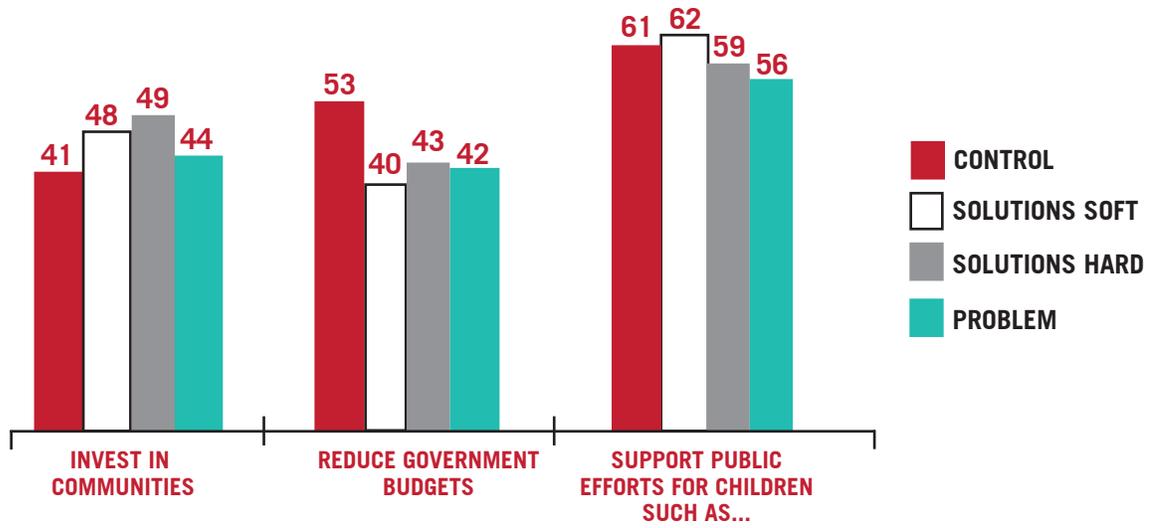
The public supports "public efforts for children such as education, after school, and health services," at high levels (8.4 average rating on a 10-point scale, 61% rate 9 or 10 on a 10 point scale among the Control Group), and the news stories have little influence on that high-level support. However, the solutions-oriented stories result in a significant increase in support for investing in communities, and both the solutions and problem-oriented stories cause people to be more resistant to appeals to reduce government budgets.

In addition, the Soft Solutions group became significantly more supportive of paying higher taxes for higher quality services as opposed to lower taxes for lower quality services, an 8-point gain in strong support.

COMPARISON IN % VERY STRONG SUPPORT FOR HIGH TAX/QUALITY
% Choose statement: I would rather pay higher taxes and have high quality public services and systems.


- CONTROL: 45
- SOLUTIONS SOFT: 53
- SOLUTIONS HARD: 51
- PROBLEM: 48
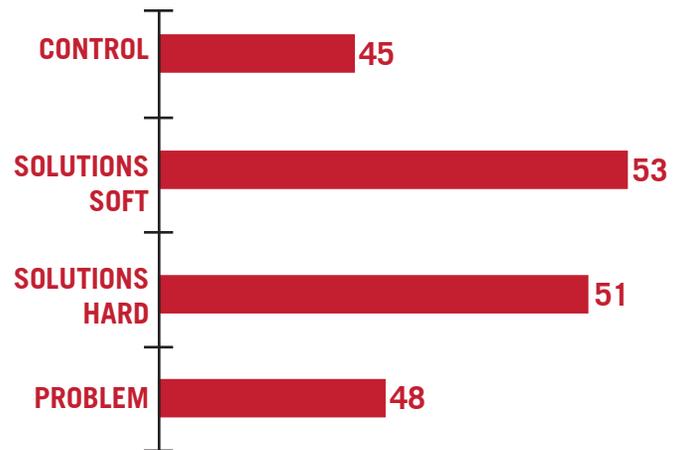
The Role for Government

*The avalanche of crisis stories in the news causes people to feel these problems are intractable. They see so many stories about problems that they assume few solutions exist. In fact, when asked, "How do problems get solved?" one common response is, "They don't." Both solution and problem-focused stories cause people to become increasingly supportive of an active government. However, the problem-focused approach causes people to become less convinced that government **can** solve problems or that people **can** work together to make a difference. A problem-centered orientation makes tough problems seem even more intractable.*

At the time of the survey, most survey respondents reported that the government is trying to do too much. Of two choices, a majority (59%) sides with the view "government is doing too many things that should be left to individuals and business," while just 41% side with the view "government should do more to solve problems," a -19 percentage point margin. As might be expected, there is an enormous partisan split on this question with Democrats supporting a more active government by a +34 point margin, and Independents and Republicans rejecting more active government by-35 and -72 point margins respectively.

GOVERNMENT SHOULD DO MORE VS. DOING TOO MUCH

BOTH SOLUTION AND PROBLEM-ORIENTED STORIES BUILD CERTAIN KINDS OF PUBLIC SUPPORT. Whether they read stories about solutions or problems, respondents become significantly more likely to believe government should do more. Furthermore, either approach causes respondents to significantly increase their support for 6 of 10 policies (the experiments did not significantly affect support for the three policies with the highest levels of support or for "making consequences more severe the first time a kid gets in trouble").

However, survey respondents become increasingly cynical about the *ability* of government to affect children's lives when exposed to the problem-oriented story. When asked to rate the impact of government on children's lives, just 42% of the control group say government has a positive influence, while 46% say it has a negative influence, a -4 percentage point margin.

GOVERNMENT IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S LIVES
What kind of impact does government have on most children's lives?
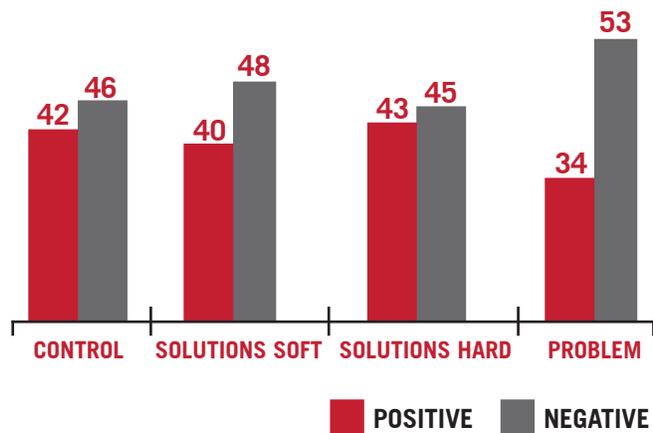
Among those exposed to the problem-oriented story, the ratings change significantly – 44% positive, 53% negative, a -20 point margin.

Furthermore, those exposed to the problem-oriented story were significantly less likely to believe that people working together as a group can make "a great deal of difference" in solving problems. Among the Control Group and those exposed to solutions stories, belief that people can make a great deal of difference in solving problems ranges from 45%-47%, but among those exposed to the problem-oriented story, just 40% feel the same.

THIS FINDING SUGGESTS THAT WHILE PROBLEM-ORIENTED STORIES MAY INCREASE THE DESIRE FOR GOVERNMENT ACTION, THEY ALSO DEPRESS THE SENSE THAT GOVERNMENT CAN ACT.

SOLUTIONS-ORIENTED STORIES BUILD JUST AS MUCH SUPPORT FOR ACTION WITHOUT INCREASING CYNICISM ABOUT GOVERNMENT AND CITIZEN EFFECTIVENESS.

Not All Problem-Oriented Stories Are the Same

Communicators often find themselves talking about problematic outcomes for children. However, this research finds it is more effective to ground the problems conversation (when it is needed) on causes – specifically, weak public systems and structures for children.

PERCEPTION OF COLLECTIVE ACTION
Comparison % People Make a Great Deal of Difference

CONTROL	SOLUTIONS SOFT	SOLUTIONS HARD	PROBLEM
45	46	47	40
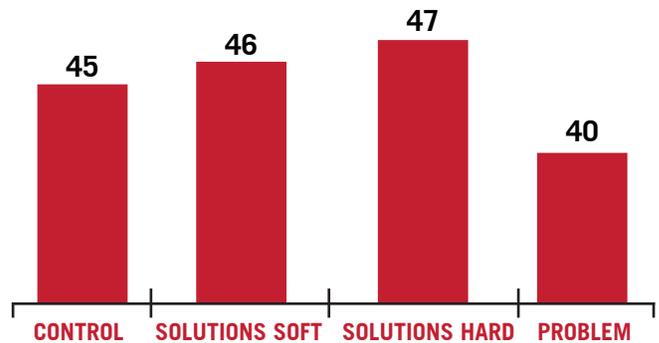
After reading a problematic *outcomes* story, respondents were no more likely to say they would pay higher taxes for higher quality services (only an insignificant 3 point gain in very strong support among respondents in the Problem Group while the Soft Solutions approach led to an 8 point gain). But after reading a story about problems in the *public systems and structures* designed to support kids, respondents in the Problem Group became significantly more likely than the Control Group, and just as likely as those exposed to solution stories, to support raising revenues rather than cutting projects and services.

RAISE REVENUES OR CUT PROJECTS/SERVICES
Comparison by Story

	CONTROL	SOLUTIONS SOFT	SOLUTIONS HARD	PROBLEM
RAISING REVENUES	33	43	44	41
CUTTING PROJECTS	67	57	56	58
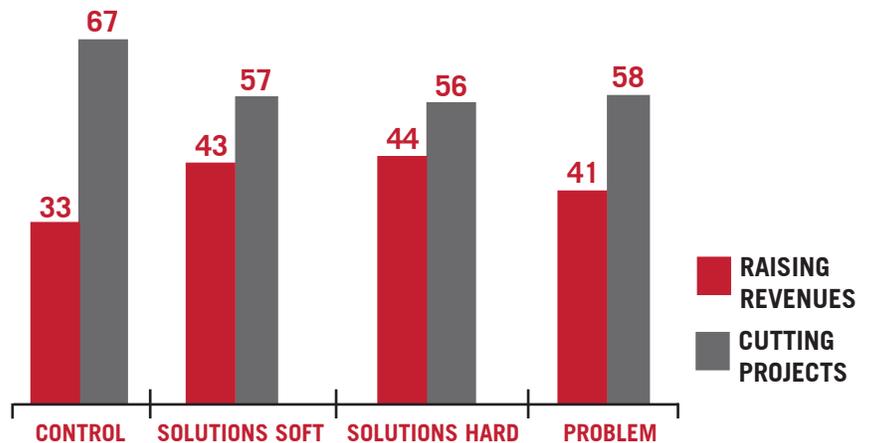
FURTHERMORE, A PROBLEM-FOCUSED STORY ABOUT SYSTEMS MAY DO AS MUCH AS THE SOLUTIONS-ORIENTED STORIES TO CAUSE PEOPLE TO PAY MORE ATTENTION TO DISADVANTAGED, AT-RISK CHILDREN. The solutions-oriented stories as well as the *systemic* problems stories increase support for policies to benefit disadvantaged, at-risk children, bringing support for these policies close to the level of support for universal access. The table below demonstrates that average support for policies for at-risk children among the Control Group is significantly lower than support for universal access for the same policies (8.2 vs. 7.7 for early education, 8.1 vs. 7.8 for health insurance), but average support among the test groups increases and comes closer to the same level of support for universal access.

CLOSING THE GAP FOR POLICIES FOR AT-RISK CHILDREN AVERAGE RATING ON A 10 POINT SCALE				
	CONTROL	SOLUTIONS SOFT PROOF	SOLUTIONS HARD PROOF	PROBLEM
Make quality early education available toall children	8.2	8.2	8.3	8.3
Make quality early education available to disadvantaged, at-risk children	7.7	8.0	8.0	8.0
Make affordable health insurance available for all children	8.1	8.0	8.1	8.2
Make affordable health insurance available for low-income children	7.7	7.9	8.1	8.0

THESE FINDINGS SUGGEST THAT TELLING THE RIGHT KIND OF STORY CAN BUILD SUPPORT FOR AT-RISK CHILDREN.

WHEN COMMUNICATIONS HAS TO INCORPORATE A DISCUSSION OF PROBLEMS, THE FOCUS SHOULD BE ON CAUSES (INADEQUATE SYSTEMS) RATHER THAN OUTCOMES ALONE.

Influence on Engagement

In the qualitative phase of research it was clear that, when told effectively, solutions-oriented stories cause respondents to express interest in supporting particular programs either through volunteerism, financial contribution, or sometimes even through voicing a desire for government support for a particular effort.

" "

I THINK IT'S MARVELOUS. AND I THINK WE SHOULD DEFINITELY HAVE SOMETHING LIKE THIS IN BOSTON. IT'S A NO-BRAINER.
-Massachusetts woman

I THINK YOU HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY WITHIN YOUR OWN COMMUNITY. THAT'S YOUR TOWN. YOU HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO BE INVOLVED IN YOUR TOWN. WE ALL DID VOLUNTEER WORK; WE ALL DID DIFFERENT THINGS OVER THE YEARS AND THAT'S PART OF BEING A TOWN IS BEING INVOLVED.
-Massachusetts man

HOW DO WE GET THAT GOING IN INDIANA? BECAUSE I THINK IT'S A GREAT IDEA.
-Indiana woman

However, the survey research was largely unable to quantify significant movement in people's willingness to engage in direct action (in response to any of the experiments). There are several possible explanations for this inconsistency:

- The process of a group discussion is likely to be more effective in generating the kind of enthusiasm needed for taking action;
- Exposure to just one message in a short survey may not replicate the movement that would happen in response to a real world shift in communications over the long term;
- Increasing engagement requires overcoming other obstacles unrelated to children's issues such as, knowing of real opportunities to engage, competition with existing commitments, etc.

This is a question and a challenge for further investigation, but should not dissuade communicators from adopting the recommendations.

Importantly, these beneficial effects of solutions stories are neither automatic nor accidental. Rather, they are the result of carefully constructed story elements that avoid triggering negative reactions, and that amplify people's sense of collective responsibility. The next section describes each of the promising story elements uncovered in the qualitative research that were incorporated into the effective solutions stories in the survey research.
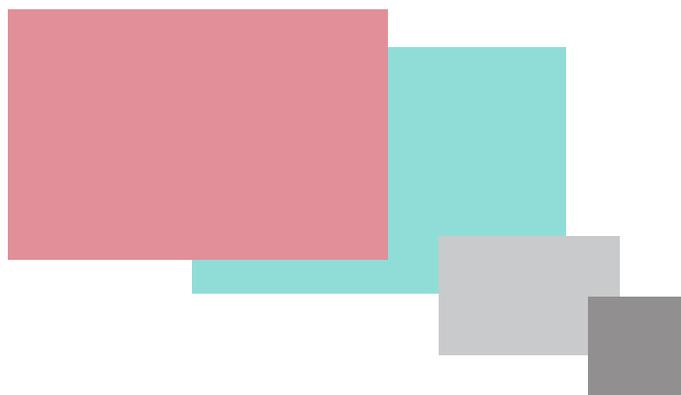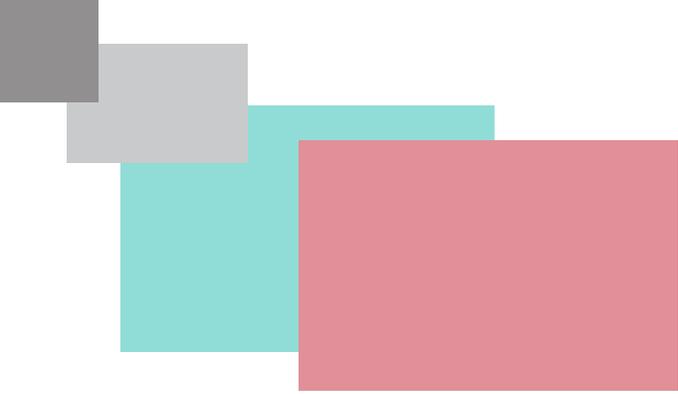
PROMISING STORY ELEMENTS

A variety of different stories, employing numerous story elements, were tested in the qualitative phase of research. While some of the stories were more immediately compelling than others, our task was not to find the perfect story. Rather, our task was to question underlying assumptions, and take some of the guesswork out of communications by identifying the elements advocates can write into their communications that are most likely to lead to public support both for particular programs as well as the broader idea of collective responsibility for child wellbeing.

Five core story elements rise to the top as being particularly important for achieving advocates' communications goals. Though presented as five distinct elements, to a large extent these elements overlap, and they all certainly complement each other.

Community Connection

As noted earlier, people's default reasoning constrains their view of children to the family – parents are responsible for their child's wellbeing and no other actors are immediately visible. To inspire willingness to act on behalf of children not their own, we need to broaden people's view to include the community. This happens when we remind people of how kids and community are connected, in two directions:

- **The whole community benefits** from kids who grow up to be contributing members.
- **The community has a beneficial influence** on children and families.

Connection is at the heart of why solutions-oriented stories have such beneficial effects, and why a problems story focused on inadequate systems is more effective than one focused on outcomes. Outcomes focus on failing children, without necessarily explaining why they are failing or how they can succeed. Left to their own devices, people often default to the Family Bubble and feel that only a child's parents have any ability to influence the situation.

In contrast, a solutions story, or a story about inadequate public structures brings this more constructive explanation to the forefront, and allows people to see how collective action matters. People are compelled to see their own responsibility and their connections to others.

At the end of the survey, respondents in the Control Group rated a number of messages. All of these messages incorporate the notion that the community has a beneficial influence on kids, though some are more overt than others. Five of the top seven messages reinforce the insight that kids will either help the community or be a burden later – the community benefits from successful kids.

CONVINCING REASON TO GIVE MORE ATTENTION TO CHILDREN'S ISSUES RANKED BY % EXTREMELY + VERY CONVINCING		
	EXTR. + VERY CONV.	EXTR. CONV.
A small investment in getting disadvantaged, at-risk kids off to the right start makes a lot more sense than paying to fix problems later.	64	28
When enough people stand together to demand change, things happen.	64	25
When we invest in getting disadvantaged, at-risk kids off to the right start, we invest in our community and our future.	59	21
A variety of effective policies and programs that help kids, from after-school programs to health care and Head Start, lead to significant improvements in kids' performance in school and in life.	59	19
Communities that support the public structures that help kids, from after-school programs to health care and Head Start, see significant improvements in kids' performance in school and in life.	57	20
Each of us has been helped by a neighbor, coach, pastor or other selfless person, so each of us has a responsibility to give back.	55	23
There are many important things we can do as a community or state to help make sure kids grow up to be good citizens. We need to make this a priority.	55	18
There are lots of effective programs that help kids. For example, one school system has trained "art therapists" who work with troubled kids a couple of times a week. After going through the program, the kids have better grades and fewer behavior incidents. We need to support these kinds of programs.	54	18
Declining state budgets threaten to undermine important successes for kids. We can't be short sighted and weaken what will help kids become productive, contributing members of the community in the future.	53	16
There are lots of effective programs that help kids. For example, one school system has trained "art therapists" who work with troubled kids a couple of times a week. The kids learn to express their feelings and in as little as six months, kids who started out angry and uncommunicative are now back on track with better grades and fewer behavior incidents. We need to support these kinds of programs.	51	18
There are lots of effective programs that can help kids do better. We need to make them a priority.	47	16
We can't let declining state budgets end up cutting funds for basic services when they are most needed in these tough economic times. Now is the time to increase funding for health and education.	46	19

With state budget battles the top priority for most advocates, these messages provide some specific guidance:

- The practical insight that getting kids off to the right start makes more sense than trying to fix problems later is particularly convincing. People want to get ahead of problems.
- "Getting kids off to the right start is an investment in our community and our future" is a values-driven version of the practical statement above.
- Reminding people of tough economic times and linking it to the need for more funding is far less effective than *reminding them of the effectiveness of programs.*

It is clear from both the qualitative and quantitative research that the idea that kids can grow up to be contributing members of the community is consistently favored as a reason to support programs. And it's not that hard for messages to tap into this desire, and help people focus on the big picture – which has the benefit of helping big-picture solutions make more sense too.

" **WHAT I GOT OUT OF IT WAS THAT THESE KIDS WILL DO THE SAME THING WHEN THEY ARE OLD ENOUGH. THEY WILL HELP SOMEBODY ELSE… IT WILL MAKE THEM BETTER PEOPLE.**
-Massachusetts man

THESE ARE KIDS THAT ARE GOING TO SHAPE THE WORLD. YOU WANT TO PUT YOUR THOUGHTS AND YOUR ENERGY INTO HELPING THEM ANYWAY BECAUSE THEY'RE GOING TO BE THE ONES THAT ARE GOING TO SHAPE THIS WORLD, AND BE PRETTY MUCH TAKING CARE OF US.
-Indiana mother

In addition, people's understanding of the importance of community in benefiting children can be readily tapped when they have a big picture view of a particular solution. For example, when people read a story about Hope Meadows, a successful intergenerational community, their enthusiasm is due in part to how this program fits their model of cohesive communities that successfully raise children.

TEST LANGUAGE:
WE OFTEN DON'T THINK ABOUT IT, BUT THERE ARE MANY IMPORTANT THINGS WE CAN DO AS A COMMUNITY OR STATE TO HELP MAKE SURE KIDS GROW UP TO BE GOOD CITIZENS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS.

" **EVERYBODY TAKING CARE OF EVERYBODY. LIKE WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, YOU CAME HOME FROM SCHOOL. YOUR PARENTS WEREN'T HOME, YOU WENT TO THE NEIGHBORS NEXT DOOR. THEY WERE LIKE GRANDPARENTS TO US.**
-New Jersey man

Problematically, this enthusiasm for cohesive communities could easily slip toward being defined narrowly as charitable action, not the full range of collective actions that include policy change, for example. To ensure that we illuminate the role of community in ways that also provide a big picture view including policy, we need to keep in mind the following additional story elements.

Big Picture

One reason the survey was able to record such strong shifts for the solutions-oriented approach was because the solutions stories focused on the "big picture."

A strong focus on either particular kids or the creators/organizers of the program can be very engaging, but can backfire by focusing people on the "little picture" and making it harder for them to appreciate broader implications. If there is any significant focus on a *single individual program*, attention tends to focus solely on that program,

and broader generalizations about the value of intervention tend to fall away as though they had never been mentioned.

The research has uncovered two promising approaches for keeping people's attention focused on the big picture:

THE ROLE OF "PUBLIC STRUCTURES"

In order to promote an appreciation of government policy's role in creating better outcomes for kids, it is helpful to talk about ow we all rely on "public structures" – but kids in particular.

TEST LANGUAGE:
WE ALL DEPEND ON "PUBLIC STRUCTURES" – INSTITUTIONS FROM FDIC INSURANCE, TO CLEAN WATER SYSTEMS, PARKS, CELL PHONE STANDARDS, LIBRARIES AND HIGHWAYS – THAT WE BUILD AND MAINTAIN AS COMMUNITIES. WHAT MANY PEOPLE DON'T REALIZE IS THAT AS A GROUP KIDS ARE MORE DEPENDENT ON THE QUALITY OF PUBLIC STRUCTURES THAN ADULTS ARE. LOTS OF STUDIES SHOW THAT COMMUNITIES THAT PAY ATTENTION TO THE PUBLIC STRUCTURES THAT HELP KIDS -- FROM AFTER-SCHOOL AND MENTORING PROGRAMS TO HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAMS FOR LOW-INCOME WORKING FAMILIES, TO CLEAN WATER INITIATIVES AND HEAD START - SEE SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS IN GRADUATION RATES, SCHOOL PERFORMANCE AND IQ, KIDS' HEALTH AND BETTER SOCIAL INTERACTION. PUBLIC STRUCTURES ARE IMPORTANT FOR ADULTS AND THE ECONOMY, BUT THEY'RE CRITICALLY IMPORTANT FOR KIDS WHO ARE STILL DEVELOPING IN EVERY WAY. WHEN WE SUPPORT STRONG PUBLIC STRUCTURES, WE CREATE THE KINDS OF COMMUNITIES THAT HELP KIDS BECOME PRODUCTIVE, CONTRIBUTING ADULTS.

This approach gives people a memorable new insight (as it does in other issue areas). It also helps people focus well on *community* – the idea that good communities lead to good kids and vice versa. It gives them a more concrete *picture of how* we create a better and stronger community.

Noticeably, this approach helps people steer away from the idea of "failing parents," presumably because it clarifies that we all depend on public structures.

"

HELPING THESE CHILDREN EARLY HELPS OUR CHILDREN TO BECOME PRODUCTIVE AND HELPFUL MEMBERS OF SOCIETY IN THE FUTURE. THE FACT IS THAT PUBLIC STRUCTURES SUCH AS THE LIBRARY ARE VERY IMPORTANT, BECAUSE SOCIETIES THAT PROVIDE THOSE THINGS HAVE MORE SUCCESSFUL AND WHOLESOME CHILDREN.
-California man

Q: IMAGINE YOU ARE TALKING TO A FAMILY MEMBER WHO SAYS, "WHAT WE NEED ARE FOR PARENTS TO DO A BETTER JOB, NOT ANOTHER EXPENSIVE PROGRAM." HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

A: NOT EXACTLY. KIDS NEED MORE THINGS TO DEVELOP INTO SOLID, CONTRIBUTING ADULTS, SUCH AS STRONG PUBLIC STRUCTURES. WE SHOULD DO MORE TO HELP THEM.
-Ohio man

LISTING A NUMBER OF PROGRAMS

Briefly discussing a number of different programs (the main tactic employed by the stories in the survey) is one straightforward way of helping focus less on a particular case study, and more on the general principle that we can and should be taking greater collective responsibility for kids' wellbeing.

In principle it is very simple to list a number of programs. The challenge lies in creating descriptions that are brief enough so that a list of several is still manageable (and brief enough so that no one story risks dominating people's attention), but substantive enough so that they

TEST LANGUAGE:
OVER THE PAST TWENTY YEARS, INNOVATIVE PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS AROUND THE COUNTRY HAVE DEVELOPED A WIDE VARIETY OF EFFECTIVE POLICIES AND PROGRAMS THAT HELP PROVIDE KIDS WITH WHAT THEY NEED TO DEVELOP IN A HEALTHY WAY, AND GROW UP TO BE GOOD CITIZENS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS.
FOR EXAMPLE: • A PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM IN MARYLAND WHERE TRAINED "ART THERAPISTS" WORK WITH TROUBLED KIDS A COUPLE OF TIMES A WEEK. THE KIDS LEARN TO EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS AND IN AS LITTLE AS SIX MONTHS, KIDS WHO STARTED OUT ANGRY AND UNCOMMUNICATIVE ARE NOW BACK ON TRACK WITH BETTER GRADES AND FEWER BEHAVIOR INCIDENTS. • A COMMUNITY IN ILLINOIS WHERE ABUSED CHILDREN LIVE WITH THEIR NEW, ADOPTIVE FAMILIES …. • THE NATIONAL CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM (CHIP) THAT HAS IMPROVED CHILD HEALTH FOR 7 MILLION KIDS BY ALLOWING WORKING FAMILIES TO PURCHASE HEALTH INSURANCE ….

strike people as interesting, clear, concrete new information, which is what makes the case studies so compelling.

When it works, this "list" approach successfully helps people focus on the broader point about the availability of approaches that work – even if people often end up keying in on one or two examples in particular that they find particularly compelling.

> ❝❞ **THESE IDEAS TAKE WORK. NONE OF THESE INITIATIVES WILL MEET ALL A CHILD'S NEEDS, BUT EACH OF THEM CAN GO A LONG WAY TOWARD A GOOD START.**
> *-Indiana mother*

Advocates could easily incorporate this idea into brochures, annual reports, community speeches, fact sheets and so on.

Necessary, not just nice

In the current economic climate, the public expects program cuts and is reluctant to support non-essential projects. Programs that are "nice to have" are not likely to garner widespread support. Therefore, communicators must ensure their stories position key programs as *necessary*.

One effective way to communicate the necessity of programs, discussed earlier, is to remind people of how the community benefits from kids who grow up to be productive adults.

Another effective approach that is overlooked in most communications efforts is a focus on *how* a particular solution works. Caring about children is not enough to inspire action on their behalf if people do not *understand* the role they can play in advancing children's needs. People need to have

some idea how a program works in order to get and stay supportive. People can be supportive in the short-term without a clear sense of why a program is effective, but maintaining support, or keeping people clearly focused on a particular objective requires understanding.

For example, a story about art therapy achieves an equally enthusiastic response in the survey whether or not it includes an explanation of how the program achieves success. But when the explanation is included, people can focus more clearly on the idea and maintain their support.

Without an explanation, respondents are more likely to think any kind of personal interaction or fun activity would have the same effect.

TEST LANGUAGE:
THE ART THERAPY CONNECTION BRINGS TRAINED PROFESSIONALS INTO SCHOOLS TO WORK WITH TROUBLED KIDS DURING THE SCHOOL DAY A COUPLE OF TIMES A WEEK. "SOMETIMES KIDS NEED EXTRA HELP WITH THEIR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT. OFTEN, KIDS WHO HAVE BEEN LABELED A BEHAVIOR PROBLEM, ARE REALLY JUST STRUGGLING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO GET ALONG IN THE WORLD," STATED PRINCIPAL WALTER MODELL. "USING ART AS A MEANS OF EXPRESSION AND CONVERSATIONAL TOOL, TRAINED EXPERTS CAN HELP THESE KIDS COMMUNICATE THEIR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS, UNDERSTAND AND CONTROL THEIR EMOTIONS, AND IMPROVE SOCIAL SKILLS."

> **" "** I THINK WE HAVE ALL PROBABLY DEALT WITH A CERTAIN KID OR KIDS THAT IN THE CLASSROOM ARE THIS WAY BUT WHEN YOU GET THEM IN A GATHERING THEY OPEN UP. THEY COMMUNICATE MORE, ESPECIALLY IF YOU'RE A COACH WHERE YOU WORK AROUND KIDS. I SEE IT ALL THE TIME WHEN IT COMES TO FISHING. I LOVE THE OUTDOORS AND I TAKE KIDS FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE AND GOING FISHING, ADVENTURES, I LIKE TO CALL THEM. KIDS WHO USED TO BE BOTTLED UP AND NOT REALLY TALKATIVE, THEY ARE IN A MORE RELAXED, CALM ENVIRONMENT. IF YOU'RE DOING SOMETHING YOU ENJOY, THAT'S WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT. IT'S ABOUT HAVING FUN.
> *-New Jersey father*

But when an explanation is included in the story, people express more understanding of, and support for those particular efforts.

> **" "** I THINK PAIN IN CHILDREN, PAIN IN A LOT OF PEOPLE SOMETIMES CANNOT BE EXPRESSED VERBALLY BECAUSE THE PAIN IS JUST TOO MUCH. SO IT'S A DIFFERENT FORM OF EXPRESSION. THAT MAY BE WHY IT'S SO SUCCESSFUL.
> *-Massachusetts mother*

> I THINK THIS PROGRAM IS FANTASTIC; IF EVERY SCHOOL IN AMERICA OFFERED THIS,I THINK WE WOULD SEE A LOT LESS VIOLENCE.
> *-Massachusetts mother*

> TRAINED PROFESSIONALS ARE REALLY THE KEY TO THE WHOLE THING. THEY ARE TRAINED TO DO IT AND THEY KNOW HOW TO DO IT.
> *-Massachusetts man*

Inspiring action

While all of the elements help to inspire action, people often continue to be reluctant to engage, particularly in support of government action. Research participants are cynical about and frustrated with elected officials and have little faith that government will create effective reform.

> THERE IS THAT FEELING THAT YOU DON'T WANT TO TRUST YOUR POLITICIANS THAT YOU ELECTED EVEN THOUGH THEY HAD A PLATFORM THAT THEY WOULDN'T DO CERTAIN THINGS LIKE THIS. [CUT PROGRAMS] NOW THEY ARE DOING IT. OR MAYBE YOU FEEL HELPLESS. YOU WANT THESE PEOPLE TO DO WHAT IS IN YOUR BEST INTEREST, BUT THEN HERE THEY ARE CUTTING BACK THINGS THAT SOME PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY REALLY NEED.
> *-New Jersey father*

While the survey was not able to quantify a shift in willingness to act, the qualitative research found that a simple, but effective way to inspire action is incorporating model examples of the behavior we want to encourage. When the test stories included examples of citizens who successfully advocated for change, people were more enthusiastic and engaged than when change was discussed in the abstract.

TEST LANGUAGE:

"IT WASN'T EASY TO CONVINCE THE CITY COUNCIL TO SET ASIDE FUNDING FOR THIS EFFORT, BUT WHEN 150 OF US SHOWED UP AT A COUNCIL MEETING, THEY HAD TO LISTEN TO US…"

ASKED WHY SHE JOINED THE EFFORT, VOLUNTEER "GRANDMOTHER" SHIRLEY WITT EXPLAINS, "A LOT OF PEOPLE WERE THERE FOR ME WHEN I WAS RAISING MY KIDS; THIS WAS MY CHANCE TO GIVE BACK. AND NOW, I LOVE THESE KIDS JUST LIKE THEY WERE MY OWN."

> **IT STICKS OUT TO ME BECAUSE I'VE BET A TYPICAL COUNCIL MEETING, THEY PROBABLY GET 10 PEOPLE. SO THAT WAS PRETTY IMPRESSIVE THAT 150 PEOPLE SHOWED UP AND IT'S GOOD TO HEAR IT BECAUSE NUMBERS PROVE THAT THEY GOT SOMETHING DONE.**
> *-Massachusetts father*

Proving Effectiveness

While one might think that proving the effectiveness of a particular solution is the most essential and difficult story element, it turns out that people's standard of "proof" does not tend to be particularly high. Two parallel solutions tracks, one with

"hard" statistical evidence of success, and the other with anecdotal support, had generally the same positive effects.

Certain groups were slightly more persuaded by the "hard proof" solutions stories: men, particularly those under 50 years old and college educated men, as well as Republicans. Other groups were more compelled by the "soft proof" solutions stories: women, particularly older women over 50 years old, and college educated women, and Democrats.

So, if advocates have statistical proof they should use it, but they shouldn't wait to embark on this communications strategy until they have "proof" and even when they do, they shouldn't leave out anecdotal storytelling devices:

Expansion and program support:
When solutions spread, people assume they are effective.

TEST LANGUAGE:
COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE CITY ARE SEEING THE REWARDS, AND NOW NASHVILLE, TENN. AND OTHER CITIES ARE STARTING TO IMPLEMENT THE SAME AFTERZONE MODEL.

> **IT HAS MIGRATED ALL THE WAY DOWN TO NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE AND OTHER CITIES. USUALLY, I GUESS IT HAD TO HAVE A GREAT IMPACT FOR IT TO GO FROM ONE STATE TO ANOTHER STATE.**
> *-Indiana woman*

Sticky numbers (a.k.a. social math):
Statistics overall aren't typically an important part of raising support, but numbers can be helpful when they are extremely straightforward – e.g. "twice as many kids …"

A note of caution: numbers that emphasize the size of the problem can be powerful and memorable, but can also easily overwhelm people and cause them to focus on how intractable the problem is.

Testimonials:
Program volunteers, or those who can personally vouch for the "success" of a particular solution can be a powerful demonstration of effectiveness.

"New" story:
It is very easy for people to slip into thinking about the stories they already know. A story about art therapy, for example, can easily get people thinking about funding cuts of public school art programs. For people to view a solution as effective the story needs to avoid triggering familiar and unconstructive storylines, and instead strike people as a fresh take.

DISSECTING THE STORYLINE

The survey incorporated a number of these recommendations to create stories resulting in shifts in attitudes and policy support. In the following two stories from the Solutions, Soft Proof version of the survey, the specific tactics have been noted.

Improvement in Child Wellbeing
In the 10 years since the Blueprint for Children strategy was developed, children across the metropolitan area **[community connection]** are better off in a number of ways, from improved test scores in school, to increased graduation rates, to declines in risky behavior. **["proving" effectiveness through assertion]**

"There are many important things we can do as a community or state to help make sure kids grow up to be good citizens **[community connection]**, and the results we're seeing in response to all the hard work by people across this community proves it. **[testimonial]** I volunteer because I see how our efforts help kids' minds light up," stated Pat Johnson, a volunteer reading tutor at Springfield Elementary. **[inspiring action]**

In response to research that showed gaps in the critical systems serving children, citizens and organizations across the area came together 10 years ago to develop the Blueprint and put in place the steps needed to fill the gaps. **[community connection]** Over the years, the systems and public structures serving children have been strengthened **[big picture]**: religious institutions grew their early education and after-school programs, the city council expanded children's health insurance, and volunteers served as mentors, ran recreation programs, and advocated for more children's funding from the state legislature. **[proving effectiveness]**

According to city council member, Sean Walker, "We've proven we can make a difference. Our kids are better off and that means our community has a brighter future. **[community connection]** Now other cities are looking to replicate what we've done. **[proving effectiveness]** We need to keep the momentum going." **[inspiring action]**

Full study results are available at (citation removed).

Ideas that Work
According to a new study, a variety of effective steps are helping children's healthy development. The study identified 100 projects that have proven to be effective in a number of ways. **[big picture]**

"The bottom line is that if we want to ensure that all kids have the best chance in life, we have many ways of doing it," stated Chris Myers, a professor at University College and author of the study. **[community connection]**

Among the 100 projects identified in the study are: **[big picture]**

- A public school system where trained "art therapists" work with troubled kids a couple of times a week. The kids learn to express their feelings and in as little as six months, kids who started out angry and uncommunicative are now back on track with better grades and fewer behavior incidents. **[necessary - how it works]** "It has made an enormous difference in our learning environment," noted Principal Scott Morell. **[proving effectiveness through testimonial]**
- A community where abused children live with their new, adoptive families and volunteer seniors acting as grandparents. All the generations end up forming bonds that are critical to healthy development. **[necessary – how it works]** "These kids are beating the odds. We see it every day,"

according to volunteer grandmother Shirley Witt. **[proving effectiveness through testimonial and inspiring action]**
- The national Children's Health Insurance Program **[CHIP]** that has improved child health for millions of kids by allowing working, low-income families to purchase health insurance on a sliding scale based on income. **[necessary – how it works]**

"Problematically, declining state budgets threaten to put these successful projects at risk," stated Lee Miller, director of Kids Now, a child advocacy group. "We can't be short sighted and weaken the public systems and services [big picture] that help kids become productive, contributing members of the community in the future." **[community connection]**

Full study results are available at (citation removed).

TRAPS TO AVOID

Americans' default associations concerning children and government are so powerful, it is very easy to trigger a problematic mindset that derails conversation even if every other story element is adhered to. Three of the most damaging traps to avoid are:

Bad Parent Trap
When parents are in the picture, even if they are portrayed in a sympathetic light, readers are highly likely to find fault with them and block out considerations of collective solutions.

For example, a story about flaws in state government assistance to families resulting in parents of older children seeking to use the Safe Haven protections, triggered a lengthy conversation about desperate (and bad) parents rather than state systems in need of improvement.

Intractable Problem Trap

Starting with the Crisis Frame, or even incorporating a lengthy discussion of the problem, causes people to focus on the problem even when the story gives prominence to the solution to the problem. Stories that are constructed as "problem then solution" are likely to be heard as "problem, no solution." Instead, stories need to feature solutions prominently before any discussion of the problem. The problem is not that people are unaware that problems exist for children; the problem is that people aren't aware of or engaged strongly enough with the solutions that advocates are trying to enact.

Just Politics Trap

People's default association with government is partisan politics, or bickering politicians who accomplish little. That in mind, people have little enthusiasm for engaging in a partisan fight and feel unable to effect change.

AUDIENCE DYNAMICS

Positive shifts in opinion after exposure to solution-oriented stories occur across most demographic groups, so it is not necessary to narrowly target these kinds of stories to some populations over others. Still, there are slight differences in response that communicators should anticipate.

Throughout the survey, party identification consistently correlates with response.

Democrats are consistent, core supporters for the kinds of efforts children's advocates want to promote. They have a positive view of government, would like to see government do more, support a range of policies, and are less tax sensitive than other groups. They value the principle of common good over self-reliance. Though they already respond strongly on most of the measures that matter, solutions-oriented stories create statistically significant shifts in support for raising taxes, and in support for specific policies. This audience does not need hard proof of success -- the soft proof story does as well, if not better, in building support.

Those who self identify with the Republican Party are among the toughest voters to attract. Republicans hold highly negative use of government, believe government is doing too much, and are firmly opposed to raising taxes (unless overtly tied to quality services, in which case they are less tax averse). Republicans value the principle of self-reliance, are less supportive of many children's policies, and are less likely to believe that people working together can make a difference. Solutions-oriented stories have a strong influence on Republicans, particularly when the stories include hard proof of effectiveness. They become less tax averse, more supportive of community investments and government budgets, and more supportive of certain children's policies.

As might be expected, self-identified Independents land in the middle of the two other parties. They hold a negative view of government, believe government is already doing too much, and are tax averse. At the same time, they value the principle of common good and community. This is a particularly challenging group since all types of stories influence their views. Problem-oriented stories reduce their sense of efficacy, but also move them in the right direction on government action and government budgets, and result in gains on a couple of policies. Solution-oriented stories move them in the right direction on government action and budgets, and have mixed results in policy support. Solution-oriented stories are a good communications approach for this group, however, problem-oriented stories may be less damaging among Independent voters than among some other demographic groups.

Beyond partisan lines, there are several groups that are core supporters of children's advocates' goals. African-American voters note high levels of engagement, believe in the power of collective action, and consistently express support for government action and children's policies, particularly disadvantaged children. Women, especially younger and college-educated women, are highly engaged, support community investments and policies to benefit children, and hold positive views of government.

While no group is "anti-child," there are some groups expressing views that indicate they are tougher audiences to attract and hold. For example, older men and men without a college education hold particularly negative views of government. Older men believe government is doing too much, and are opposed to raising taxes. However, they do believe that citizenship requires certain obligations – perhaps a way to engage them.

Importantly, solution-oriented stories create positive effects with all these groups, though some groups are more influenced when the story includes "hard" proof, such as: Republicans and men, particularly younger men, and college-educated men. Democrats and women are less likely to need "hard" proof to be influenced, and some groups of women are more influenced by the anecdotal proof, particularly older women. Women are also more susceptible to the negative influences of the problem-oriented story, especially younger women and non college-educated women.

CONCLUSIONS

Communicators cannot assume that people will automatically support measures for kids such as government action or higher taxes. Instead of simply asserting a need, remind people of the quality public services and systems that matter, that solve problems.

Furthermore, sympathy for children is not enough to win public support. Advocates should change the public's relationship to the problem; instead of charity, emphasize collective responsibility. That means grounding the conversations in community, common good, and the power of people working together for change.

This research suggests that advocates have a powerful, underused tool in their communications toolkit – the Solutions Story. To craft an effective Solutions Story, communicators should advance particular ideas while avoiding others.

ADVANCE	AVOID
We have solutions	We have problems
Getting kids off to the right start	Fixing the problem
We all benefit	Kids are struggling
The community has a role	Parents are responsible
The power of people working together	The power of government
We all rely on public structures	Children need a safety net
There are lots of effective solutions	Here's one case study
There are lots of solutions	There are lots of programs
How a solution works	Just the emotional appeal of a solution
Hard evidence if available, anecdotal if not	Stories that don't demonstrate effectiveness

A variety of different stories, employing numerous story elements, were tested in the qualitative phase of research. While some of the stories were more immediately compelling than others, our task was not to find the perfect story. Rather, our task was to question underlying assumptions, and take some of the guesswork out of communications by identifying the elements advocates can write into their communications that are most likely to lead to public support both for particular programs as well as the broader idea of collective responsibility for child wellbeing.

Specifically, communicators should tell solutions-oriented stories by incorporating the following concepts:

Connection to Community

The whole community benefits from kids who grow up to be contributing members:

- A small investment in getting disadvantaged, at-risk kids off to the right start makes a lot more sense than paying to fix problems later.
- We've proven we can make a difference. Our kids are better off and that means our community has a brighter future.
- Getting kids off to the right start is an investment in our community and our future.

The community can have important beneficial influences on children and families:

- A variety of effective policies and programs that help kids, from after-school programs to health care and Head Start, lead to significant improvements in kids' performance in school and in life.
- There are many important things we can do as a community or state to help make sure kids grow up to be good citizens.

Big Picture Thinking

Listing a number of solutions:

- The bottom line is that if we want to ensure that all kids have the best chance in life, we have many ways of doing it, such as…

Public Structures:

- Communities that support the public structures that help kids, from after-school programs to health care and Head Start, see significant improvements in kids' performance in school and in life.
- Problematically, declining state budgets threaten to put these successful projects at risk. We can't be short sighted and weaken the public systems and services that help kids become productive, contributing members of the community in the future.

Necessary, not just nice (explain how it works)

- In a community where abused children live with their new, adoptive families and volunteer seniors acting as grandparents, all the generations end up forming bonds that are critical to healthy development.

Inspiring action

- When enough people stand together to demand change, things happen.
- Each of us has been helped by a neighbor, coach, pastor or other selfless person, so each of us has a responsibility to give back.
- I volunteer because I see how our efforts help kids' minds light up.

"Proving" Effectiveness

- Communities throughout the city are seeing the rewards, and now Nashville, Tenn. and other cities are starting to implement the same model.
- The results we're seeing in response to all the hard work by people across this community proves it.

Finally, when communications has to incorporate a discussion of problems, the focus should be on causes (inadequate systems) rather than outcomes alone.
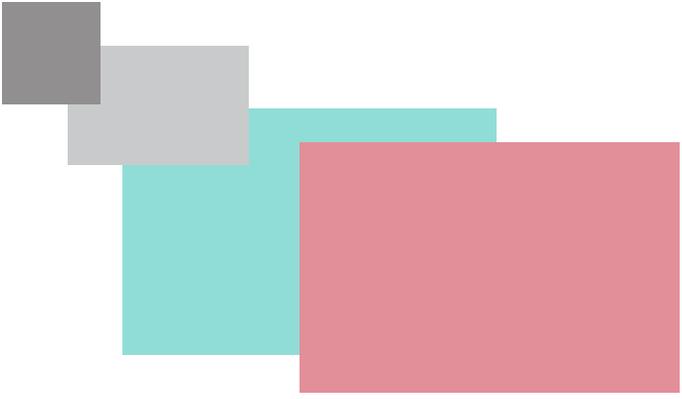
topos partnership
changing the landscape of public understanding

Founded by veteran communications strategists Axel Aubrun and Joe Grady of Cultural Logic and Meg Bostrom of Public Knowledge, Topos has as its mission to explore and ultimately *change the landscape of public understanding* where public interest issues play out. A basic premise of the Topos approach is that, while it is possible to achieve short-term victories on issues through a variety of strategies, *real change* depends on a fundamental shift in public understanding. Only when people can see an issue in a new way, can they begin act accordingly.

Many advocacy efforts are unsuccessful because they fail to help people see an issue in a new way. Instead, most assume successful communications requires heightening the emotional power of a message. They emphasize "crisis" or "epidemic" or characterize the problem in a frightening or shrill tone. Our research clearly demonstrates that an emotional connection is not enough, and the wrong kind of emotional connection can even prove counterproductive. Effective communications must fill a gap in understanding or correct misunderstandings in perceptions to inspire support or motivate action. When people lack a *useful conceptual picture* of an issue – which typically includes a grasp of the "big picture," and the key causal dynamics at work – their engagement is limited and they may act most naturally as self-interested *individuals* or *consumers*,

rather than *responsible citizens*. To be effective, we must shift the frame of reference, the cognitive lens, people bring to an issue.

Changing the landscape of public understanding is neither a quick nor easy undertaking. The Topos Partnership was created to bring together the range of expertise needed to understand existing issue dynamics, explore possibilities for creating new issue understanding, develop a proven course of action, and arm advocates with new communications tools to win support.

The Topos principals have developed a unique and innovative approach that combines new methods adapted from the social and cognitive sciences with the more familiar methods and perspectives of public opinion research and communications practice. Specifically, Topos brings together a number of disciplines (public opinion, linguistics, anthropology, political science, advertising, journalism, public relations, video production and so on) to understand an issue from all angles and recommend solutions using all communications tools.
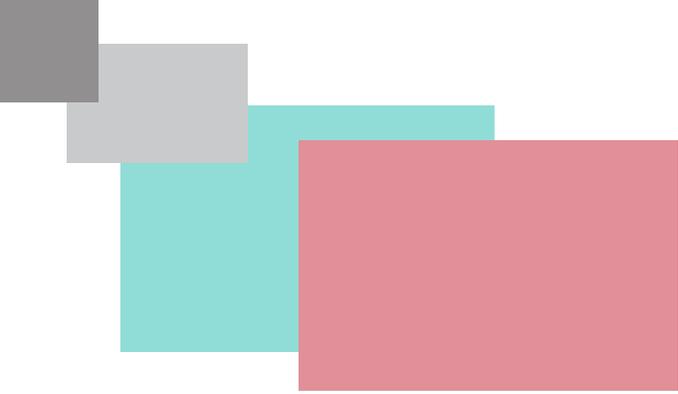
APPENDIX: SURVEY STRUCTURE

Four nationally representative groups of registered voters were surveyed concurrently, channeled through one of four survey documents: a Control Group (n=500) that saw no news stories; a Solutions, Soft Proof Group (n=503) that read solutions-oriented stories without statistical proof of success; a Solutions, Hard Proof Group (n=501) that read solutions-oriented stories including statistical proof; and, a Problem Group (n=502) that read problem-oriented stories. The control group and the test groups each consists of a national sample of adults drawn proportionate to registered voter population. Demographic characteristics were weighted when necessary to be consistent across splits.

Survey Structure, Experiment Detail

A central element of this research was to investigate the dynamics of stories emphasizing solutions compared with stories emphasizing problems. To quantify the strengths and weaknesses of each orientation, survey respondents were initially exposed to one of three approaches: solutions that offer only anecdotal evidence of success, solutions that offer statistical evidence of success, or a story focused on problems.

SOLUTIONS ORIENTATION – SOFT PROOF	SOLUTIONS ORIENTATION – HARD PROOF	PROBLEM ORIENTATION – OUTCOMES FOCUS
Improvement in Child Wellbeing In the 10 years since the Blueprint for Children strategy was developed, children across the metropolitan area are better off in a number of ways, from improved test scores in school, to increased graduation rates, to declines in risky behavior. "There are many important things we can do as a community or state to help make sure kids grow up to be good citizens, and the results we're seeing in response to all the hard work by people across this community proves it. I volunteer because I see how our efforts help kids' minds light up," stated Pat Johnson, a volunteer reading tutor at Springfield Elementary. In response to research that showed gaps in the critical systems serving children, citizens and organizations across the area came together 10 years ago to develop the Blueprint and put in place the steps needed to fill the gaps. Over the years, the systems and public structures serving children have been strengthened: religious institutions grew their early education and after-school programs, the city council expanded children's health insurance, and volunteers served as mentors, ran recreation programs, and advocated for more children's funding from the state legislature. According to city council member, Sean Walker, "We've proven we can make a difference. Our kids are better off and that means our community has a brighter future. Now other cities are looking to replicate what we've done. We need to keep the momentum going." Full study results are available at (citation removed).	**Improvement in Child Wellbeing** In the 10 years since the Blueprint for Children strategy was developed, children across the metropolitan area are better off in a number of ways. School test scores have improved an average of 3 percentage points each year, graduation rates have increased from 55% to 62%, and risky behavior like drug use has become less common (marijuana use has declined from 28.1% among teenagers to 25.3%). "There are many important things we can do as a community or state to help make sure kids grow up to be good citizens, and the results we're seeing in response to all the hard work by people across this community proves it. I volunteer because I see how our efforts help kids' minds light up," stated Pat Johnson, a volunteer reading tutor at Springfield Elementary. In response to research that showed gaps in the critical systems serving children, citizens and organizations across the area came together 10 years ago to develop the Blueprint and put in place the steps needed to fill the gaps. Over the years, the systems and public structures serving children have been strengthened: religious institutions doubled their early education and after-school programs, the city council provided an additional $3 million for children's health insurance, and volunteers served as mentors, ran recreation programs, and advocated for more children's funding from the state legislature. According to city council member, Sean Walker, "We've proven we can make a difference. Our kids are better off and that means our community has a brighter future. Now other cities are looking to replicate what we've done. We need to keep the momentum going." Full study results are available at (citation removed).	**Children Feeling Negative Effects of Economy** (Note: adapted from a real article in the Lansing State Journal) The state's dismal economy could erase any gains made in child wellbeing, according to a recently released study. "We're going through a seismic change in terms of what's happening in this state," said Pat Johnson, author of the study. More kids qualify for free or reduced-price lunches at school, an indication that poverty is increasing. The number of mothers getting inadequate prenatal care skyrocketed. "If women have fewer options, they're going to have a harder time getting prenatal visits," said Sean Walker, a primary care physician and city council member. The number of babies born to teenagers decreased, but money for those programs has been cut. "What's going to happen next year? It's so nice to have made all this progress but gloomy to think about it slipping away in the future," said Walker. Kids' scores on the Educational Assessment Program tests increased. The caveat: "We know that part of what is happening is that schools are getting really good at teaching to the test," Johnson said. "Are we producing well-rounded students or are we producing good test takers?" Full study results are available at (citation removed).

After reading the stories, all respondents in the test groups were asked to:
- share their top-of-mind reactions
- compare the story they read with articles they typically see in the news on four criteria
    - interesting
    - unique
    - motivating
    - important
- rate how likely they would be to
    - find out more, and
    - share the article with a friend.

Then, all survey respondents in both the Control and Test Groups were asked a series of key indicator questions:
- efficacy – how much difference people working together as a group can make in solving problems
- their support for "Investment" issue priorities:
    - reduce government budgets
    - invest in communities
    - support public efforts for children such as education, after school and health services
- whether they sided with the view "Being a good citizen means having some special obligations," or the alternate view "Simply being a good person is enough to make someone a good citizen"
- the likelihood they would engage in certain actions in the next year
    - Volunteer
    - Vote
    - Keep informed about issues facing children

- Donate to children's organizations
- Participate in town hall meetings
- Sign an online petition about children's issues
- Forward via email interesting articles about children's issues

- whether they sided with the view, "I would rather pay higher taxes and have high quality public services and systems," or the alternative view, "I would rather pay lower taxes even if it means low quality public services and systems" and,
- whether they sided with the view, "The best way to solve the problems we face is by emphasizing shared interests and supporting the common good," or the alternative view, "The best way to solve the problems we face is by emphasizing self-reliance and supporting individual independence."

At this point, respondents were exposed to a second article, continuing the approach as the earlier story. However, instead of an outcomes-focused story, those in the Problem Orientation Group were exposed to a story about problems/inadequacies in the systems designed to help children.

SOLUTIONS ORIENTATION – SOFT PROOF	SOLUTIONS ORIENTATION – HARD PROOF
Ideas that Work	**Ideas that Work**
According to a new study, a variety of effective steps are helping children's healthy development. The study identified 100 projects that have proven to be effective in a number of ways.	According to a new study, a variety of effective steps are helping children's healthy development. The study identified 100 projects that have proven to be effective in a number of ways.
"The bottom line is that if we want to ensure that all kids have the best chance in life, we have many ways of doing it," stated Chris Myers, a professor at University College and author of the study.	"The bottom line is that if we want to ensure that all kids have the best chance in life, we have many ways of doing it," stated Chris Myers, a professor at University College and author of the study.
Among the 100 projects identified in the study are:	**Among the 100 projects identified in the study are:**
• A public school system where trained "art therapists" work with troubled kids a couple of times a week. The kids learn to express their feelings and in as little as six months, kids who started out angry and uncommunicative are now back on track with better grades and fewer behavior incidents. "It has made an enormous difference in our learning environment," noted Principal Scott Morell.	• A public school system where trained "art therapists" work with troubled kids a couple of times a week. The kids learn to express their feelings and in as little as six months, kids who started out angry and uncommunicative are now back on track with 65% of program participants moving from failing to passing grades and behavior incidents declining by 37%.
• A community where abused children live with their new, adoptive families and volunteer seniors acting as grandparents.	• A community where abused children live with their new, adoptive families and volunteer seniors acting as grandparents. All the generations end up forming bonds that are critical to healthy development, and research shows these kids are beating the odds – 68% graduate from high school compared with 52% of abused kids who do not go through the program.
• All the generations end up forming bonds that are critical to healthy development. "These kids are beating the odds. We see it every \ day," according to volunteer grandmother Shirley Witt.	
• The national Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) that has improved child health for millions of kids by allowing working, low-income families to purchase health insurance on a sliding scale based on income.	• The national Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) that has improved child health for 7 million kids by allowing working, low-income families to purchase health insurance on a sliding scale based on income.
"Problematically, declining state budgets threaten to put these successful projects at risk," stated Lee Miller, director of Kids Now, a child advocacy group. "We can't be short sighted and weaken the public systems and services that help kids become productive, contributing members of the community in the future."	"Problematically, declining state budgets threaten to put these successful projects at risk," stated Lee Miller, director of Kids Now, a child advocacy group. "We can't be short sighted and weaken the public systems and services that help kids become productive, contributing members of the community in the future."
Full study results are available at (citation removed).	Full study results are available at (citation removed).

After reading the stories, all respondents in the test groups were asked to:
- share their top-of-mind reactions
- compare the story they read with articles they typically see in the news on four criteria
    - interesting
    - unique
    - motivating
    - important
- rate how likely they would be to
    - find out more, and
    - share the article with a friend.

Then, all survey respondents in both the Control and Test Groups were asked a series of key indicator questions:
- the impact of government on most people's lives
- the impact of government on most children's lives
- whether they sided with the view, "Government should do more to solve problems" or the alternative view, "Government is doing too many things that should be left to individuals and business"
- whether state governments should balance their budgets by concentrating more on raising revenues through taxes or cutting projects and services
- whether they sided with the view, "To deal with reduced revenues to run government, I think all programs and services should be cut back equally," or "I would pay more in taxes if it went to programs and services for children," or "I would pay more in taxes if it went to programs and services for children, with disadvantaged, at-risk children being the highest priority," or "None of the above."

- whether they sided with the view, "The principle of a strong community is most important. America is most successful when we pursue policies that expand opportunity and create a rising prosperity for all, not just a few," or the alternative view, "the principle of self-reliance is most important. America is most successful when we have a limited public role that keeps taxes low so that businesses and individuals can prosper"
- their support for a series of children's policies:
  - cut taxes
  - make quality early education available to all children
  - make quality early education available to disadvantaged, at-risk children
  - increase high school graduation rates
  - make affordable health insurance available for all children
  - make affordable health insurance available for low-income children
  - expand opportunities for quality after-school programs
  - improve foster care and child protective services
  - shrink government budgets, and
  - make consequences more severe the first time a kid gets in trouble.

Thanks to the following people who agreed to serve as advisors and to the many unknown experts who had input into the project.

NAME	TITLE	ORGANIZATION
Jeffrey Bormaster	Senior Director	Child Welfare League of America
Julia Coffman	Senior Consultant	Harvard Family Research Project
Don Crary	State Director	Annie E. Casey Foundation
Brenda Eheart	Executive Director	Generations of Hope, Inc.
Bob Granger	President	William T. Grant Foundation
Mark Greenberg	Senior Fellow	Center for American Progress
Nancy Leonard	Public Policy Officer	William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund
Bruce Lesley	Executive Director	Generations of Hope, Inc.
Jennifer March-Joly	Executive Director	Citizen's Committee for Children of New York
Karen Pittman	Executive Director	Forum for Youth Investment
Debbie Rappaport	Project Director	Zero to Three Policy Center
Hershel Sarbin	Chairman	Child Advocacy 360
Sharman Stein	Director of Communications	NYC Administration of Children's Services
Linda Tilly	Executive Director	Voices for Alabama's Children
Ruth Wooden	President	Public Agenda

NOTES

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