CODESIGN TOOL:

Framing the Research

As a facilitator, guiding your team through a process to co-develop framing for your resource involves several key steps. First, your team must understand what is meant by framing and how framing content/messages helps to achieve your co-design goals. Next, you need to assess the amount of time your team can give to this part of the process, and select your framing development activities accordingly. To help you with this facilitation, we have provided an assortment of tools and activities.

Understanding Framing and Messaging

What is a frame?

A frame is how you choose to present information. When you frame a resource, be it a research-informed message, infographic, or product, you thoughtfully select words, images, and colors to convey a message to your audience.

Framing impacts our decisions and perceptions. For example, which jar label makes the contents more appealing?

While both jars have the same fat content, one jar feels more appealing than the other. A simple change of how information is communicated can result in a different action or reaction from your audience.

If your goal, for example, is to encourage people to use sunscreen, you could focus on what using sunscreen will help you gain:

> *"Use sunscreen to keep your skin looking young and healthy!"*

Or your message could be focused on loss or fear:

> *"Being in the sun without sunscreen causes skin cancer and will accelerate your skin's aging process, causing the early onset of wrinkles."*

Or your message could be focused on being part of the norm:

> *"93% of beachgoers use sunscreen. Where's your bottle?"*

Or your message could focus on freedom:

> *"Applying this once-a-day sunscreen means you can safely swim, play or relax in the sun without worrying about sunburn."*

All of these messages are meant to encourage the same action — to use sunscreen — but they are framed differently.

Tips for Framing Messages

As you consider wording for your resource's key messages, you may find the following tips helpful. The suggestions below are drawn from research by sociologists and psychologists who study the effects of messaging on behavior[1].

- Use concrete and tangible wording.
- Personalize messages to your audience whenever possible by understanding your audience's values and appealing to their interests.
- Impart a hopeful vision or solution-based message, rather than a problem-focused message.
- Capitalize on social norms to have the biggest impact on behavior. When people see someone else doing something, they are more likely to do that behavior, too. Therefore, make sure your message doesn't show that the majority of people do the undesired behavior.
- Use messages that attempt to change behaviors and systems, not attitudes. Know that "attitudes follow behavior, they do not predict it."

Activities for Frame Development

The following steps are meant to provide you with approaches for developing frames. Select activities based on the amount of time you have available for this part of the co-design process.

Step 1: Learn about your audience

Learning about your audience's values, needs, and interests, as well as how they might think or talk about your topic, is important for message frame development. The activities below are options designed to give you processes for understanding your audience. These options range from allocating a chunk of time in your agenda, to extended and more time-consuming processes that would need to occur outside of meeting time. As you work through one or more processes, be sure to consider that you may have more than one audience for which to plan.

[1] Jeni Cross (2013). "Three Myths of Behavior Change: What Your Think You Know that You Don't" TEDxCSU, Fort Collins, CO (March); Cherney, Mark (2021). 3 Practical framing tips to make your communication more powerful. Alive & Thrive. Retrieved from: https://www.aliveandthrive.org/en/inspire/3-practical-framing-tips-to-make-your-communication-more-powerful; Frameworks Institute (2023). Fast Frames - Episode 3: Alternatives to Vulnerability Framing. Retrieved from Fast Frames – Episode 1 | FrameWorks Institute

Activity: Co-design group brainstorm (20-30 minutes)

If you do not have access to your audience(s) to directly ask them questions, your co-design group may wish to use the chart below to analyze and anticipate your audience's needs, as well as appeal to their interests and values. Fill out a table for each of your key audiences.

Audience: [Enter response here]	
Concept/topic: [Enter response here]	
Audience values:	**Audience interests:**
[Enter response here; for example, Efficiency, Equity]	[Enter response here; for example, Math pedagogy, collaboration]
Knowledge of the topic:	**Misconceptions or knowledge gaps:**
[Enter response here; for example, 6-8 Math Standards]	[Enter response here; for example, Signs of dyslexia]

Activity: Explore public discourse on your topic (1-3 hours)

Another option for learning about your audience involves analyzing the public discourse that your audience might have created, or discourse that your audience might read. This could include reading posts in social media groups or tweet threads, and if applicable, reviewing news articles and/or messaging by professional organizations on your topic. If your group chooses to review public discourse, consider the following questions in your search:

- What are the current frames in use?
- How does your audience appear to feel about the topic?
- How do supporters and non-supporters (if applicable) talk about this topic?
- What gaps in knowledge or misunderstandings exist on the topic?
- What prior knowledge or implicit assumptions might your audience be bringing to the subject?

Keep in mind that the topics and perspectives represented in public discourse are a product of power in society and may be biased towards more extreme opinions. Therefore, it is important to consider whose voices and what ideas may not make it into public discourse.

Audience Activity: Converse with your key audience(s) (5-10 hours)

A more involved approach to understanding your audience(s) is to directly engage with them through interviews or conversations. Based on your unique topic, you will need to construct questions that allow you to understand the specifics of your audience's knowledge, potential gaps in knowledge or misconceptions, or implicit assumptions about the topic, and their overall interests/values.

Sample Questions:

Question Purpose	Sample Questions
Associations	When you hear the term/word/phrase [insert topic], what do you think of? If I say [insert metaphor or analogy] what does that make you think of?

Attitudes	How do you feel about [insert topic]?
Knowledge	If you were trying to explain [insert topic] to someone, how might you describe it?
Gaps/Misconceptions	What do you wish you knew about [insert topic]?
Interests/Values	What motivates you to engage in your work? What do you feel is the most important part of [insert topic]?

Step 2: Develop frame(s)

There is no single method for developing frames, so consider this a brainstorming process. Your goal for brainstorming should be to have determined a frame(s) to first test with your audience (should you have time) or, if needed, to use directly in your resource. As you craft possible options, be sure to revisit the tips provided earlier in this document, as well as to keep in mind (1) your goals for communication, (2) addressing gaps in knowledge or misconceptions, and (3) appealing to your audience.

Frame Development Activity: "Everything But the Kitchen Sink" Brainstorming Method

In this method of brainstorming, the old adage of " the more the merrier" is the key.

"Rules":

- Be as creative (and far-fetched) as possible!
- Try to "add on" to others' ideas rather than make judgments

Process:

1. Provide team members with the needs for framing (knowledge gaps, audience interests, goals for communicating)

2. Set a timer for 10-15 minutes and ask team members to develop as many ideas as possible for framing your message. Encourage team members to include analogies and metaphors if possible.
3. Ask team members to refine options to their top 5-10 favorite ideas and share these ideas in a collaborative document
4. Provide team members with 5-10 minutes to read through the group list and select their top 5-10 ideas.
5. Use a process to identify team favorites - this could include a more formal process, such as having everyone star* their top 3-5 frames, or a less structured process, such as talking through the benefits of each frame and verbally/mutually agreeing upon top contenders.
6. To reduce options to one or two favorites, revisit questions such as: To what extent does this frame follow the tips for framing? To what extent will this frame appeal to our audience's interests, values, and knowledge needs?