

Framing Two-Generation Approaches to Supporting Families

MESSAGING GUIDE

Two-generation proponents have many opportunities to reach out to their communities, their colleagues, and policymakers to explain how we can build broader well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives *together*.

Below are topline messages to make a strong case, suggestions for using language that makes your work more compelling, and ideas for bringing your two-generation work to life in a way that allows people to appreciate what a sensible, effective approach it represents.

These messages are based on the results of research and analysis by the FrameWorks Institute. They are not context-specific. Communicators like you should use them as a filter as you craft messages suited for specific audiences, channels, and topics.

TOPLINE MESSAGES

We must maximize people's potential to contribute to our the civic, social, and economic lives of our communities.

Example

Our state's greatest resource is our people power – and our policies can either block or unlock the full potential of our neighbors and community members. When we create the conditions that invite children to learn and allow adults to apply their skills, we tap into the hidden human potential all around us.

Our policies should allow and encourage agencies and organizations to work with children and the adults in their lives together.

Example

Two-generation (2Gen) approaches build family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives *together*. For example, if parents qualify for a tuition grant to go back to school, then it makes sense to see if a child care program is available to make sure that while they are studying, their children are learning, too. When health and human service programs are designed to construct well-being with children and families together, the resulting structure is stronger and better for both generations – which makes it better for our state.

For two-generation approaches to work, it's essential to partner with families as equals.

Example

We've given up the illusion that agency professionals know what's best, and instead, we're working on the assumption that good policy and good governance is made by, and with, the people. Our approach involves families in analyzing where previous efforts have fallen short and what needs to be changed to make sure things work for all families.

WAYS TO MAKE THE CASE

Lead with strength and opportunity: Instead of leading with messages that focus attention on the supposed deficits of families, shift attention to the barriers that current programs present and the challenges that unfair, incomplete, or short-sighted policies create.

Example

Our two-generation approach boosts the power of our education and employment systems, working closely with communities whose connections to these resources have been frayed and patchy for too long. By reducing the steps required for families to plug into an opportunity, we're increasing participation in programs that unleash their potential.

Maximize metaphor power. It helps to compare the delivery of human services to the construction of a building, as this metaphor broadens people's understanding of what is required for people to thrive.

Example

We all recognize the bricks and mortar of well-being: postsecondary education and employment pathways, early childhood education, economic assets, social capital, and mental and physical health. When these materials aren't available to children and the adults in their lives, the foundations of well-being are weak.

Share the science – but avoid highly technical language. The two-generation field can benefit tremendously from the science translation techniques that have helped to propel advances in early childhood policy and practice. Use the “brain frame” to bolster policy changes with scientific insights, but steer clear of multisyllabic mouthfuls like *sensitive neurobiological periods*.

Example

Over the past 30 years, scientists have shown that the first five years of brain development are foundational, allowing us all to realize the importance of the early years. Babies form more than 1 million new neural connections each second! Now, scientists have evidence that becoming a *parent* is like getting a permit to update the wiring of the brain. For young adults whose home or school experiences didn't build in strong skills, becoming a new parent offers a chance to remodel the brain architecture. On the other hand, if we allow stress to pile up on new parents, the opportunity can be missed.

FRAMING TO AVOID

Talk less about service delivery. Remember that only the wonkiest of audiences can follow the finer points of funding streams and policy implementation. In most contexts, it's better to focus on the big idea: we're making it the norm to work intentionally with children and the adults in their lives *together*.

Avoid “basic needs” framing. Americans tend to assume that public programs should provide “just the basics” and that assistance should be both temporary and minimal. In this mindset, it's harder for people to grasp the holistic nature of two-generation approaches. Tried-and-true phrases like *safety net*, *food and shelter*, and *basic needs* can trigger or reinforce the unproductive “just the basics” mindset.

Avoid vocabulary that suggests that two-generation work is simply smarter charity. Words like *help*, *assist*, or *benefit* focus attention on the moment of need instead of the structural conditions that led to a situation. Describing people as *needy*, *struggling*, *vulnerable*, or *at-risk* sets up an unproductive contrast between noble, magnanimous “haves” give to the “have-nots.”

Steer clear of hyperbole. Americans – both conservative and progressive, both policymakers and citizens – tend to assume that previous attempts to improve public services have largely failed. Given this, talking about two-generation work as a total transformation could leave the impression that your ideas are unrealistically idealistic.

These tips will help you craft memorable, effective messages for the public and policymakers. More information on the research and rationale behind these recommendations is available in *Framing Two-Generation Approaches to Supporting Families*.