Framing Research Literature Review

> **ideas42 seeks to understand what aspects of language and framing can encourage donors to increase their support of organizations advancing equity, especially racial and gender equity in the United States. Many organizations effectively addressing inequities are smaller and staffed by people who are members of the communities they seek to help, and often struggle to get the funding they need.**

We reviewed existing literature to begin addressing some of these challenges. Much of what we found is related explicitly to framing requests for charitable donations, but we also focused on several other important areas of research, including linguistics, research into political ideology, and understanding public perceptions of the term "equity."

We're sharing some of the most relevant papers and articles we came across in our research, in an effort to guide other organizations seeking to learn more about how to communicate with their particular donor audiences. In synthesizing this research, we've identified areas of research that we'd like to pursue further through lab and field tests, and plan to share more about this research in the coming months—stay tuned!

Language framing

Describing donation recipients as "worthy" had little effect on donation behavior: Researchers studied whether framing the recipients of donations as "worthy" of the support affected donation behavior. They found that overall, worthiness framing did not affect donation amount. It did positively affect donation rate, though not statistically significantly. The factor that most strongly correlated with someone's likelihood to donate was their beliefs about why inequality exists. Those whose views about the origins of inequality were challenged most saw the biggest change in donation rate.

▸ Almond, R (2021). Are you worthy of my help? An experiment in worthiness framing on charitable donations. *Working Paper series, University of East Anglia School of Economics, Centre for Behavioural and Experimental Social Science (CBESS) 2021-03.* https://ueaeco.github.io/working-papers/papers/cbess/UEA-CBESS-21-03.pdf

The word "gift" may elicit more giving than the word "donation": Through six studies, the researchers found that framing charitable giving as a "gift" rather than a "donation" increases both donors' intentions to give as well as the amount of their contribution. This effect was weaker among donors who wanted to maintain a sense of "social distance" from the donation recipients, indicating that people who place a lot of value in their high status in the social hierarchy are less compelled by the "gift" framing.

▸ Wang, P. X., Wang, Y., & Jiang, Y. (2023). Gift or Donation? Increase the Effectiveness of Charitable Solicitation Through Framing Charitable Giving as a Gift. *Journal of Marketing, 87*(1), 133–147. https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429221081506

Visual framing

Imagery is a powerful tool that can reinforce negative stereotypes—or be used strategically: The author studied 320 photos from the 32 largest international nongovernmental organizations operating in the United States to evaluate whether they perpetuated stereotypes of people of color living in developing countries. The findings suggest that these organizations still portray these individuals stereotypically, reinforcing colonial narratives of "othering." Some examples of the stereotypes represented in the photographs include photographs of single mothers, infants, and girls, and few representations of men and families; focus on the subject's eyes, often looking to the ground to suggest subservience. The author did note that more positive imagery, of people smiling, has become more of a norm (rather than photos depicting explicit suffering). The author proposes additional study to understand how these types of images affect donors' perceptions of people living in poverty.

> ▶ Bhati, A. (2023). Is the representation of beneficiaries by international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) still pornographic? *Journal of Philanthropy and Marketing, 28*(4), e1722. "
> https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.1722

Evoking donor motivation

An overview of research on donor preferences: This paper reviews experimental studies related to fundraising to understand donor preferences, including whether donors prefer giving to local vs. distant organizations, framing an organization's work in absolute vs. proportional numbers, emotions most likely to elicit donations, and framing donations as goal attainment vs. loss prevention. It is a comprehensive review of 189 studies over an eight year period, which the authors group into various themes. We recommend reading the full paper to understand the nuanced results they share.

> ▶ Bhati, A., & Hansen, R. (2020). A literature review of experimental studies in fundraising. *Journal of Behavioral Public Administration, 3*(1), Article 1. https://doi.org/10.30636/jbpa.31.129

A survey to understand donor motivations for giving: Researchers studied open-ended responses to a global survey about giving to understand why donors supported the particular organizations to which they donated, and how identity plays into one's nonprofit preferences. Donors mentioned identities (social and shared) more frequently than motives that have traditionally been highlighted in the philanthropic literature, such as values, benefits, and need. Donors highlighted religious, family, organizational, friendship group, human, and health-related identities. Respondents showed a strategic preference toward people within their own groups. However, the respondents also appeared willing to help outgroup beneficiaries that they identified as important, powerless, and needy.

> ▶ Chapman, C. M., Masser, B. M., & Louis, W. R. (2020). Identity motives in charitable giving: Explanations for charity preferences from a global donor survey. *Psychology & Marketing, 37*(9), 1277–1291. https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21362

Tailored emotional appeals can influence donor behavior: This study looks at whether using emotions that are congruent with an organization's mission can influence donation behavior. It found that organizations that seek to promote welfare and humanitarian relief should evoke emotions that prioritize ethical concerns of care (e.g., compassion), and that organizations seeking to promote justice and equality should evoke emotions that prioritize ethical concerns of fairness (e.g., gratitude).

▸ Goenka, S., & van Osselaer, S. M. J. (2019). Charities Can Increase the Effectiveness of Donation Appeals by Using a Morally Congruent Positive Emotion. *Journal of Consumer Research, 46*(4), 774–790. https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucz012

Acceptance of inequality tempers giving: *Power distance* is the extent that inequality is expected and accepted. *Power distance belief* is the extent to which a person, regardless of their actual power, expects and accepts inequality. This study was one of the first to examine the effect of power distance on charitable behavior, and demonstrated the negative effects of power distance and power distance belief on donations of time and money.

▸ Winterich, K. P., & Zhang, Y. (2014). Accepting Inequality Deters Responsibility: How Power Distance Decreases Charitable Behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research, 41*(2), 274–293. https://doi.org/10.1086/675927

Linguistics

Racial labels can influence donation behavior: Through several studies, researchers looked into whether people associate "Black" and "African American" racial labels with the historical movements within which those labels were more prominently used (Civil Rights and Black Power, respectively). They found that the label "Black" is more commonly associated with bias and discrimination ideology, while "African American" is associated with civil rights and equality ideology. Of particular relevance to giving, using the terms "African American" or "Black" shaped white participants' assumptions about the organization's ideologies, and affected donation behavior: white participants who prioritized alleviating bias and discrimination gave more to an organization with a "Black" label.

▸ Hall, E. V., Townsend, S. S. M., & Carter, J. T. (2021). What's in a Name? The Hidden Historical Ideologies Embedded in the Black and African American Racial Labels. *Psychological Science, 32*(11), 1720-1730. https://doi.org/10.1177/09567976211018435

Phrasing can ascribe intentionality to an action: Researchers tested whether study participants attributed more intentionality to a person's actions based on whether the actions were described as something the person "was doing" compared to something the person "did" (imperfective vs. perfective aspect). They found across three experiments that the study participants attributed more intentionality to a person's actions when the actions were described using the imperfective aspect (describing actions as something the person "was doing"). These studies described the actions of

individuals, rather than organizations, but these findings could be useful in thinking about how to frame an organization's work, or how an organization talks about the populations with whom they work. For example, a nonprofit could say that during the COVID-19 pandemic they "were providing free masks and other protective equipment to frontline workers" to emphasize the intentionality of their response to a crisis. Further research should be done to understand how these language shifts could influence donor behavior.

▶ Hart, W., & Albarracín, D. (2011). Learning about what others were doing: verb aspect and attributions of mundane and criminal intent for past actions. *Psychological science, 22*(2), 261–266. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797610395393

Moral reframing

Reframing policy positions to match an individual's ideology can sway beliefs: People of both political parties typically create arguments based in their own moral convictions when trying to persuade others. These moral arguments tend to be unpersuasive to people of other ideologies. Moral reframing is a technique where a position an individual would not normally support is framed in a way that is consistent with that individual's moral values. Moral reframing can be an effective way to communicate political positions, and to successfully persuade others. Studies of moral reframing suggest that it's an effective technique for persuading individuals across a wide range of polarizing topics, including views of economic inequality, environmental protection, same-sex marriage, and major party candidates for the U.S. presidency. The article's authors' explanation for why moral reframing works is that the targets of the messaging perceive a "match" between their own moral convictions and the policy position in the messaging. Since moral convictions are strongly held, it is difficult for a target to discount the messaging, even when it is advocating for a position they typically would not agree with. Our team plans to explore whether tailoring donation appeals for different audiences, using strategies like moral reframing, can influence donor behavior.

▶ Feinberg, M., & Willer, R. (2019). Moral reframing: A technique for effective and persuasive communication across political divides. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 13*(12), e12501. https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12501

Perceptions of the term "equity"

What does "racial equity" mean to Americans?: Lumina's racial equity research included a national opinion and message-testing survey about opportunity and racial equity in the United States. This survey was conducted in 2019, before nationwide racial justice protests in 2020. In 2020, Lumina released this data for public use. The data serves as a baseline measurement of the public's awareness and attitudes about racial equity concepts in the United States.

▶ Lumina Foundation (October 2019). *Interactive Data: Racial Equity Themes.* https://www.luminafoundation.org/interactive-data-racial-equity/

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