Making the Case for Systems Change

Tackling the Issues of Gentrification & Displacement

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STRONG, PROSPEROUS, AND RESILIENT COMMUNITY CHALLENGE (SPARCC)
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The CaseMade

*"Building the **public will** necessary to transform the systems that shape the future of our communities, is one of the most critical challenges of our time."*

Dr. Tiffany Manuel
Author, *Backfires, Bias and Bedtime Stories: The Urgency to Solve What Ails America*, Forthcoming 2019

📌 Objectives for the Research on Gentrifiction and Displacement

This brief summarizes the general objectives of Strategic CaseMaking™ and research conducted by Dr. Tiffany Manuel to elevate the capacity of social changemakers to advance anti-displacement and equitable development policies. This work should help changemakers:

- recognize the challenges and the importance of building public will in support of these policies
- identify what current practices are working to advance these issues in the field already and alternatively, what practices are making it more difficult to generate support and
- provide recommendations for making a stronger case for public support around these issues, create a stronger appetite for systems change, and to do so, in an equitable and inclusive way.

📌 Now, more than ever, we need to invest in building public will around these issues.

The work to build the public will to advance equitable and inclusive development may be tougher than many of us realize. While we are lifting data, policy and programmatic solutions, we are often missing the opportunity to change the narrative about *why* equity and inclusion matter; *what* "equity" and "inclusion" actually mean; *why* equitable development is a shared public concern; and *what* systems changes are needed to advance better outcomes for all.

📌 In addition, while we are often working to build *political* will, we miss the concommitant (and perhaps more difficult) challenge of building *public* will.

Policymakers may be the gatekeepers of resources, but it is broad public support (or outrage) that enables the kind of scale needed to transform systems and enact longer-term, more impactful solutions.

"…the more problematic issue here is that the economic plight of low-income Americans is worsening, and we do not have the public support we need to scale policies that would improve their well-being and transform the racially/ethnically segregated neighborhoods in which they live…."

Dr. Tiffany Manuel

[Who Gets to Live Where, and Why? The Answer May Be Settled By Our Narratives](#)

📌 **Too often we let our data and research about the challenges facing low-income families and communities of color, stand-in for a strong call-to-action. And when we do, it often backfires. That is, our data and research ultimately become the negative flash point for people who feel disconnected from these issues more generally, or who disagree with the broader set of policies that would advance equitable development.**

We often overestimate the extent to which data, research and evidence can move public support for action. Surely, data are important for designing, implementing and evaluating investments that help residents stay connected to their homes, but those data must be embedded in a broader effort to make the case for systems change in an equitable and inclusive way, if they are to be helpful in elevating public support. Elevating the wrong data – especially when it is about people of color – produces an especially unfortunate backfire that undermines an equity agenda.

📌 **While we know that many Americans feel personally empathetic towards those who are struggling, as recent polling suggests, our public policies wreak of a growing antipathy toward the poor that is difficult to dislodge.**

Many of the same people who say in polls that they are in favor of better housing solutions for residents, fail to support affordable housing developments when they are proposed in nearby neighborhoods; fail to support local or national legislation that would make it possible to foster more equitable or inclusive development; and fail to support the community organizations trying to help low-income residents remain in their neighborhoods, as new investments are taking place. The issues of gentrification and displacement are at the heart of this problem, as they show how little sustained public appetite there is to fundamentally correct or address these issues through policies and systems change.

"While it may be true that Americans believe that everyone <u>should</u> have a decent place to live, the logic that Americans use to understand why people <u>do not</u> have the housing they need, as well as what should be done about it, are encapsulated in these dominant narratives."

Dr. Tiffany Manuel

[Dismantling the Narratives that Constrain Public Support for Fair Housing: The Urgent Need to Reframe the Public Conversation to Build Public Will](#)

The primary strategy operative in the field today is awareness raising – our attemtps to bring more visibility to the displacement happening in our communities. Yet, the lack of awareness is NOT the challenge we face. Most people know how bad the economic circumstances are for low-income families and most middle class are just one paycheck away from financial disaster and/or displacement themselves.

Our work in "awareness raising" consistently backfires because it evokes a zero-sum attitude, a "what about me", separate-fates response. An attitude that does not recognize the struggles of low-income families as unique but rather something we are all trying to stare down! The question often asked - why focus more attention on the poor or people of color when all of us are feeling trapped by an increasingly fragmented social safety net, economic pressures to keep our families afloat, and a government that feels like it is in full-fledged free fall?

To advance support for policies and programs that need scale, we must do a much better job of navigating the trifecta of the most dominant narratives (*individual responsibility, mobility* and *racial difference*).

When these dominant narratives operate in tandem (as they do on the issue of gentrification), it is a trifecta that leads to a predictable refrain – you are not "entitled" to this neighborhood. Change means:

• it is your own responsibility to find/afford a decent place to live (*The Narrative of Individual Responsibility*);

• move to a place that better reflects your budget and paycheck (*The Narrative of Mobility*) and

• any racial or ethnic differences between who gets to stay in this neighborhood and who has to move, is merely a reflection of the work ethic and cultural values of those negatively affected groups rather than a structural, spatial and system problem (*The Narrative of Racial Difference*).

📌 Our narrative research on gentrification and displacement showed that there are other powerful narratives that shape public discourse on these issues.

- **Displacement and Racial Segregation as Natural Outcomes of a Functioning Market-Driven Economy** vs. *a Function of Intentional Policies*

- **The Threat of Displacement as a Motivator** vs. *An Impediment to Individual and Regional Success*

- **Any Investment in Distressed Communities as "Progress"** vs. *Some Investments as Potentially Harmful*

- **Displacement and Racial Segregation is About People of Color Who Fail to Invest in Their Neighborhoods** vs. *As Issue that Concerns ALL of us and How We Provide Pathways to Opportunity*

- **Investments in Distressed Areas Means Moving Poor People** vs. *Investments in Distressed Areas Can be Achieved Without Displacement.*

- **Any Criticism of Displacement Due to Investment is An Affront to Progress, Prosperity and Wealth Creation** vs. *An Opportunity to Help Residents Be More Stably Housed*

📌 A review of news media as well as private-sector and public-sector institutions (as understood through news media), reveal some of the challenges in how these issues are being discussed in public discourse.

- **News media** overwhelmingly frame these issues as a contest between powerful interests – developers and community residents – rather than as an opportunity to chart a new course that resolves a larger and longer-term set of social concerns for everyone. (namely, the failing social contract)

- **Public Sector Institutions (federal, state and local governments)** except in rare cases, are responding as if they are mediating those powerful interests, rather than remedying a problem they have created and have a responsibility to fix.

- **Private Sector institutions (banks, developers, etc.)** are able to exploit the tension between their corporate social responsibility and their profit-making ventures. That is, they exploit the expectations of them as only needing to extend resources up until the point at which they are able to still realize revenue.

"And, the lack of broader public support should concern advocates deeply not just because we need greater public support to fully implement equitable development policies, but because our assumptions have led us down a pathway that is not building public will. While it is important to recognize and explain how the policies of the past have had a deleterious impact on the racial, ethnic, and economic inequalities of today, history lessons are proving to be effective mechanisms for building the public will needed to dismantle harmful policies and redesign unjust systems."

Dr. Tiffany Manuel

Dismantling the Narratives that Constrain Public Support for Fair Housing: The Urgent Need to Reframe the Public Conversation to Build Public Will

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Building public will around equity requires us to be more intentional about HOW we make the case for systems change.

As advocates for equity, we have all learned and mastered the art of making the case for change by presenting logical arguments with our data and evidence or through the stories about people facing displacement. These arguments miss the mark when they do not recognize and anticipate how those arguments will be received by public audiences – audiences who already have predisposed beliefs about how the world works.

If our goal is to build public support for equity, we need to redefine what it means to "make the case" for the policies, programs and investments we know would help.

Our task is to be intentional about how we make the case for equity – at very least to do no harm and at most, to change the public conversation in ways that lift up the need for systems change.

Strategic CaseMaking™ is about changing the way that we invite a more thoughtful public discourse, how we help people see their stake in our success and how we ultimately, bring a broader sense of trust and belonging to the issues we are trying to solve.

📌 The good news is that there is a growing body of social science and emergent strategies from community development practitioners for strenghtening how we make the case for systems change.

At the most basic level, Strategic CaseMaking™ helps to advance public support for systems change and is defined and shaped by several principles.

- Establishing Trust, Belonging & Stake from the Start
- Creating a sense of *We"* & *"Why"*
- Navigating the dominant narratives
- Using our data to anchor solutions
- Positioning equity as a "systems problem (a challenge for smart, adaptive leaders to solve, NOT a challenge of failed or flawed people)
- Telling the "Story of Us" rather than the "Story of Marginalized People"
- Repositioning listeners in the context of our collective future.

📌 I was there the day the conversation changed...

Change does not happen overnight, but the best way to judge if your Strategic CaseMaking™ redirections are working is by listening to the public conversation on the other side of it. When everyday people start to talk about displacement as a matter of systems change, you are winning the war of public opinion.

📌 Strategic CaseMaking™ does not mean that we're able to convince everybody that equity is an important goal. It means that we are able to reshape the public conversation so that those whose opinions can be redirected, will be.

It is unrealistic to expect that our improved practice of Strategic CaseMaking™ will impact all people in the same way. While we won't win over everybody with a more thoughtful approach, we HAVE TO win over some of them. When deployed effectively, Strategic CaseMaking™ can be instrumental in building stronger public support for equity by reducing the social distance or disconnection they feel from the issues we are raising as advocates.

case • making
[keys-mey-king] *noun*

1: the act of making a convincing or persuasive argument about how the world can ought to work to advance equity and the collective responsibility we have to manifest that world through intentional systems change work.

2: enrolling support from key stakeholders in a course of action, a way of thinking, or new belief system by limiting social distance.

"Advancing more equitable and inclusive development in our communities is only possible to the extent that we can convince others that it is a goal worthy of collective, intentional and corrective action."

Dr. Tiffany Manuel
Author of *Backfires, Bias and Bedtime Stories: The Urgency to Solve What Ails America*, Forthcoming 2019

📌 **What's Working in Our CaseMaking™ around Gentrification and Displacement?**

We reviewed anti-displacement policies in 22 cities across the country – looking at their successes, ongoing challenges and opportunities to advance their work. Looking specifically at their CaseMaking™, here's what is working well:

- sharing the stories of people either experiencing displacement or at-risk of being displaced
- positioning displacement as "unjust" unfair
- centering equity in the center of these conversations (especially racial equity)
- highlighting the consequences of inaction – that is, explaining how the lack of an intentional effort to undesign the current systems of disadvantage will continue to exacerbate economic and society inequalities.

📌 **What's Backfiring in Our CaseMaking™ around Gentrification and Displacement?**

BACKFIRE #1: *Stories about the displacement challenges that low-income residents face often backfire in the face of the narrative of individual responsibility.*

BACKFIRE #2: *Making our case in terms of "choice", housing markets, and "moving to opportunity", we inadvertently trip the wire that invokes "moving" as a powerful corrective for what ails our communities.*

BACKFIRE #3: *Our attempts to raise the issue of racial equity backfires very quickly in the face of the powerful narrative of racial difference, when not evoked in the context of system solutions.*

BACKFIRE #4: *We often lack a strong value proposition or call-to-action to help make the case for a specific course of action.*

"...the work to improve the surrounding neighborhoods is on the critical path to racial equity and inclusion. They are the same struggle. Working toward racial equity in housing means that we are actively and intentionally pursuing policies, programs and investments that reduce racial disparities – with the goal of making it impossible to use race as a predictor of any negative social outcome. While there are many ways to address racial equity and build more inclusive communities in the context of housing, we should be clear on the fundamentals."

Dr. Tiffany Manuel

Author of *Building Justice: How to Talk About Racial Equity in a Way That Gets it Done*

Recommendations for Practice:
Tackling the Issues of Gentrification & Displacement

- Our task is to diversify the perceptions of who the beneficiaries of equitable and inclusive development policies are in the region. That is, we need to position equitable and inclusive development as a benefit to ALL of us, not simply as a mechanism to help people of color avoid deleterious outcomes.
- Our task is to make the story "big enough" to help others see the issues of gentrification and displacement as shared public concerns that require a broader policy/systems response.
- Our task is to tell the "story of us" (or to widen the stories we are telling to also include a wider range of community stakeholders). That is, to help people see how they are implicated in, and affected by, displacement in ways that they do not always realize or acknowledge.
- Our task is to help people see that these issues impact every aspect of our region – our institutions, our relationships, our economy, our workforce, and our future. So, lead with a strong narrative of interdependence that highlights the inter-reliance of racial and economic groups in the region.
- Our task is to carefully navigate away from the dominant narratives that backfire when we raise issues of gentrification and displacement. Recognizing the narrative of mobility is powerful, focus less on the fact that gentrification forces people "to move"

and more on how the growing instability across the region makes it difficult for public institutions (schools, hospitals, governmental agencies, etc.) and private businesses (small business owners for example), to function. In this way, highlight the ways in which everyone loses when so many communities are in disruptive transition.

- Our task is to make a stronger case *for* equitable and inclusive development as a smart Investment in the long-term future of the region, rather than *against* gentrification and displacement. Equitable and inclusive development as important investments in our future, should be the driver of the conversation – fully acknowledging that those kinds of investments have a series of residual benefits like reducing the shortage of affordable homes, ameliorating displacement, and (where applicable) addressing the challenges of concentrated poverty.
- Our task is to center racial equity as a lens (or set of metrics) that can be used to gauge how equitable and inclusive our community development has become. That is, a racial equity lens gives us a kind of barometer on how effective our systems are functioning to advance better outcomes.
- Our task is not to shy away from the conversation about race and how it impacts development but rather, to be strategic in how we raise the issue as part of a broader, more constructive conversation. That conversation should queue up thinking about how to redesign systems so that they do not undermine opportunities of any one group of people but opens up opportunity for everyone.

Links to Resources from Dr. Manuel:

- [Who Gets to Live Where, and Why? The Answer May Be Settled By Our Narratives](#)
- [Dismantling the Narratives that Constrain Public Support for Fair Housing: The Urgent Need to Reframe the Public Conversation to Build Public Will](#)
- [Anchoring to Strengthen Your Region's Case for Systems Change](#)
- [Building Justice: How to Talk About Racial Equity in a Way That Gets it Done](#)
- [Triumph over NIMBY attitudes is not only possible, but necessary](#)
- [Using Data to Create Opportunity](#)
- [Finding, Measuring, and Addressing Urban Equity](#)

The CaseMade

Our mission is to transform communities all over the world by helping leaders build the public will to intentionally tackle the issues of equity and inclusion. We work across sectors and issue areas to help leaders understand the power of Strategic CaseMaking™ and to use it as a critical instrument for systems change. Our approach is to use trainings, workshops, community engagement and consulting to deliver resources that are transformative. Connect with us through our website, social media or email - @TheCaseMade.