



Building the Public and Political Will for Ending Homelessness and Creating Communities Rich with Abundant Housing

A CaseMaking Playbook for Leaders Everywhere



Our Sincerest Thanks



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We are grateful to all the homelessness leaders across the country who took the time to meet with us and share perspectives that informed this playbook.

TheCaseMade would also like to acknowledge and thank all the community members around the country who have participated in our listening sessions around housing, homelessness, economic mobility, and other issues over the past several years. By listening to you talk about your shared hopes and dreams, we know there is a path to a better, more just future together.

We as leaders must have a toolbelt full of will-building skills and strategies that invite others to join — and stay — with us on our journey not just to ending homelessness but to ensuring abundant housing for everyone.

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The Actions We Take Today Will Determine Our Future

In the homelessness field, we do what we do every day because we believe to our very core that everyone deserves a home. That we all need and want places that nourish us and make us feel safe and keep us healthy. And when we all have that, we build our community's strength and resilience to navigate the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Yet every step we take toward ending homelessness these days feels like it's followed by two steps back. Opponents boldly question our proven approaches. Our partners in other systems don't believe this is their problem to solve. And elected officials and the public quickly lose patience when our nation's deep systemic inequities aren't immediately fixed.

These are not technical challenges. They are challenges of public and political will. And they require that we as leaders have a toolbelt full of will-building skills and strategies that invite others to join — and stay — with us on our journey not just to ending homelessness but to ensuring abundant housing for everyone.

This playbook is the beginning of that learning journey. We're glad you're leaning in with us. We hope you'll stick around for a while.

Why focus on “abundant housing”?

When we lift up the needs of people experiencing homelessness in our communities, what do we most often hear? *There's not enough – money, time, people, expertise– to get this done.* That scarcity mindset is incredibly damaging to us because it discourages all kinds of people from supporting the solutions we know work best.

And it's simply not true. Our communities have more than enough dollars, resources, human talent and potential to solve this issue. What's missing? The public will to prioritize and deploy them to end homelessness.

When we refocus people on **abundance**, we connect homelessness to the thing virtually all people want: an abundance of housing choices that meets their budget and their needs – whether they are just leaving home for the first time, growing a family, ending a relationship, or retiring. And we remind people that our communities are already equipped with the resources we need to get there.

Abundant housing means directing our policies, programs and investments toward ensuring that there are opportunities for everyone to find the housing that best supports their wellbeing, starting with those who need it most: people experiencing homelessness.

We all deserve to live in places with abundant housing...with abundant choices...with abundant opportunities for thriving. So, let's get after it!

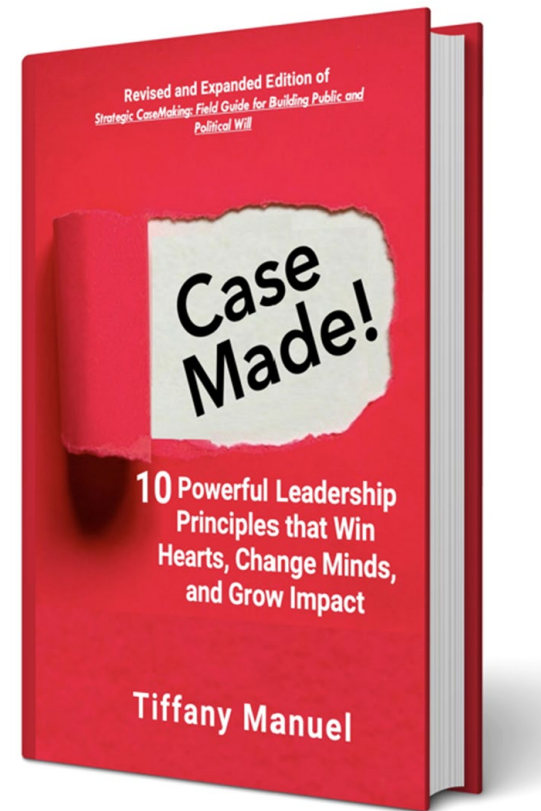
Using the Playbook

Building long-term support for system change is a team sport. To win, we need to design smart plays together, practice them a lot, and adjust them as we shift among the players, coaches, fans, and bystanders we are activating on our behalf. We also need to pivot around tough opposition. That requires an intentional strategy.

This playbook provides some initial structure and recommendations for that work. It is designed around Dr. Tiffany Manuel's Strategic CaseMaking™ framework, which is based on more than 30 years of social and cognitive science of persuasion.

The playbook is a starting place for you and your allies as you build will for the system changes you need to achieve not just an end to homelessness, but abundant housing.

At TheCaseMade, we are ready to accompany you, with resources and peer learning to support your Strategic CaseMaking journey.



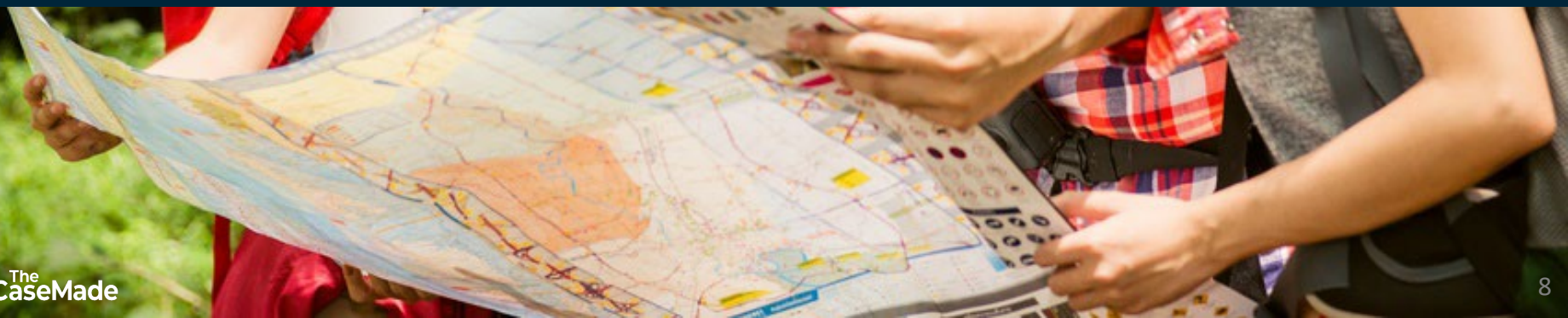
Let's face it, there are no magic words or easy answers.

To build long-term support for the system changes that will get us to the future we want, we must be intentional and thoughtful. Years of social science and community practice guide our path:

- 1** Listen carefully to the ways all kinds of people in our communities currently think and talk about homelessness so that we can strategically navigate around the obstacles and capitalize on the opportunities to build stronger public support.
- 2** Create a thoughtful engagement strategy — a ground game — to mobilize a broader group of champions to the work of ending homelessness and achieving abundant housing.
- 3** Use the principles of Strategic CaseMaking to invite, inspire, and energize those champions behind our efforts to build more just systems that benefit everyone.



1 Navigating Current Thinking





The ways people currently think about homelessness can create both obstacles and opportunities as we work to ensure that everyone has a place to call home.

As skilled CaseMakers, we start by LISTENING DEEPLY to the beliefs of all sorts of people in our communities so we can thoughtfully and strategically navigate around the impediments and capitalize on the opportunities to draw people to action. *Listening always comes first*, if we're serious about building public will.

Spotting Unhelpful Narratives

By listening, we know that these and other deeply engrained beliefs are standing in the way of broader support for ending homelessness. They are pervasive, which means they affect our ability to build support among the general public and to open doors across all the different systems we need to succeed.



DOMINANT NARRATIVE	WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE
Police and Public Health, Not Housing	<i>"These folks are either on drugs or have mental health issues if they're living on the street! The compassionate thing is to force them into shelters and treatment so they don't die on the streets."</i>
Individual Responsibility	<i>"I worked hard to put myself through college, save money, and buy my house. If I did it, you should do it."</i>
Deservedness and Choices	<i>"Some people just don't make good choices. They should prove that they can get clean and hold down a job before we help them. Otherwise, they'll just waste the help we give them."</i>
Mobility	<i>"Not everyone can afford to live here. If you can't make it here, then you should just move somewhere else. There's plenty of housing in other parts of the country."</i>
If We Build It ...	<i>"If we start offering more supportive services for those without shelter, we'll be a magnet for everybody within 500 miles who wants a free ride on our tax dollars."</i>
Racial Bias	<i>"Some groups just want handouts. They don't want to work. That's why they are in the situation they are in."</i>
The Government and the 'Homeless Industrial Complex' are the Problem	<i>"We pay all these taxes and it just gets wasted. Nothing ever gets fixed. Why should I give the government and the 'homeless industrial complex' more of my money?"</i>
Zero-Sum Thinking	<i>"If we let all these new people move to our city, there won't be enough good housing to go around. We need to stop people from coming here, especially people who can't afford to support themselves!"</i>
The Free Market Rules	<i>"Just let the free market take care of this! It's just supply and demand. The housing market will take care of itself eventually."</i>
Housing First Is Unfair	<i>"It's not fair that some people just get housing handed to them. No one handed me a place to live!"</i>
Homelessness Is a Choice	<i>"We have shelters, but people don't want to use them. I guess some people want to live on the street."</i>

Seeding New Narratives

Leaders across the homelessness field have told us that these are narratives we need to start hearing more widely across other systems and the general public to know that we are making progress.

Replacing existing dominant narratives with these will take time, strong coordination and skilled CaseMaking.



THE NARRATIVE WE NEED	WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE
Everyone wants a home	<i>"Everyone wants a place where they can shut the door and have a safe respite from the outside world. That's what I want. That's what my neighbors and friends want. It's a no-brainer that everyone wants that."</i>
Housing is a human right	<i>"A safe place to call home is what we owe to each other as humans."</i>
We belong with and to one another	<i>"In our community, we see ourselves in one another. We understand each other's deep desire to be loved and cared for. We all rise together."</i>
Homelessness is solvable	<i>"We've got all the tools we need to solve this problem, and amazing people across our community leading our progress. Let's throw our support behind them and get it done!"</i>
We trust that people know what they need	<i>"If you need better transportation to end your homelessness, then that's what we'll help with. We know you've got a plan. How else can we help you with it?"</i>
When we make housing abundant again, we all win	<i>"Remember when we could look at 10 places to live and pick the one that worked for us? When we have that many options again, we'll all benefit!"</i>
We solve homelessness by fixing our housing system	<i>"The housing system in this country is too hard to navigate! Real estate and financing and contracts and credit. It's no wonder so many people wind up without a place to live. We fix that, we fix homelessness."</i>
Homelessness is a symptom of an economy that doesn't work for us	<i>"I see more people on the streets every day. Why aren't we doing more to make sure that people have enough income to keep a roof over their heads?"</i>
We have a moral responsibility to address the root causes of homelessness	<i>"Homelessness doesn't exist in a vacuum. It's caused by structural racism, a capitalist economy that is extractive and greedy. The result for far too many has been perpetual hardship, lack of access to what people need to thrive and generational trauma. We have to deal with that!"</i>
To build the future, we must repair the past	<i>"Our systems were designed from the beginning to harm Black and Indigenous people. To move forward and get to the future we all want, we must acknowledge and repair that harm."</i>

Capitalizing on the Moment

Fortunately, recent shifts in how everyday Americans view housing and homelessness in this critical moment can give us new opportunities to engage a wider number of people, if we learn to harness these opportunities properly.





Interest

Affordability has become a challenge virtually everywhere, making housing a top-of-mind issue for many more people than ever before.

Stake

Many more people know someone personally – among their family, neighbors, or friends – who is struggling to find or keep housing, making the issue more immediately relevant to them.

Urgency

Communities across the country are starting to prioritize solving housing and homelessness as a foundation for other challenges they face.

System Visibility

Because so many people are struggling to find housing within their budget, there is a stronger willingness to identify systemic rather than individual “failings” as the source of the problem.

Acknowledgement of Systemic Injustice

Recent high-profile instances of racial injustice have led many more Americans to engage in discussions about how systems were designed to fail certain groups of people.

Racial Equity Lens

More housing and planning departments and community partners are using a racial equity lens. This is a huge opportunity for housing justice to reshape our work.

Centering Race, Centering Equity

We've come a long way in the past few years to name and begin to address the legacy of racism in our communities and our country.

We also have a very long way to go.

To achieve justice that repairs past harms, we must invite more people to act on the kinds of policies, investments, services, and programs that redress racial discrimination and inequity.

To activate more champions of these justice-centered issues, we have to build a bigger tent. We have to get more people and institutions to see that it's in their best interest to embrace the call to action on equity and racial justice.

That means our CaseMaking needs to carefully navigate the dominant narratives, like those on page 11, that we know are roadblocks on the journey to justice.



We won't back down from conversations about race or about justice. We also can't leave behind the people we need to achieve it.

Some tips as you center race and equity in your CaseMaking

Name the tension caused by differing perspectives: How we label what we're seeing can help our case or hurt it. To engage all kinds of new champions in our work, we need to be mindful of our audiences — especially as we center race and equity. Naming how people label inequities differently can get us to a more productive conversation right away. For example, saying something like this:

Families of color haven't had the same access to resources or opportunities to own homes, rent apartments, or find shelter as others in our community. Some of us will call that reality "unfair." Others will call it "discriminatory." And still others will unflinchingly say it's "racist." We may not all agree on what to name it, but whatever you call it, let's agree not to take it into our shared future! We envision for ourselves a future where everybody thrives, and that requires that we redress and remove the things that are dividing us.

Prepare for each audience: Imagine you're teaching calculus to students who have different backgrounds in math. For the whole class to succeed, you can't jump straight into derivatives. In some spaces, starting the conversation with equity can backfire on you. In others, you'll lose the room if you *don't* lead with a strong statement about our legacy of racism. As CaseMakers, we must consider each audience and tailor our approaches accordingly. Don't back down. But be strategic about getting people on the road to justice.

Create space for a learning journey: Race-based discrimination in America is built on a history that many people never learned and some actively deny. Those who genuinely want to learn it may need more time to understand how opportunity was unfairly withheld from families in their community who only wanted to own homes, build careers, accumulate wealth, and create the kind of future for their children that we all want.

Centering Lived Experience



So many of us have stories about times in our lives when our housing was less than certain. We have to listen to and make space for all those stories!

In our field, we are getting much better at centering lived experience. Increasingly, we are drawing from people's direct experiences of homelessness, housing instability, and housing scarcity in order to reimagine and redesign our systems in ways that get at real solutions. It's not yet universal practice, but we're getting there.

To increase our impact, let's recognize that almost everyone has those experiences!

Whether childhood instability, leaving for college, struggling to pay rent or buy a first home, divorce, illness, retirement, or other life events, almost everyone in this country has a story to tell about the existing housing system making their lives harder or actively working against them.

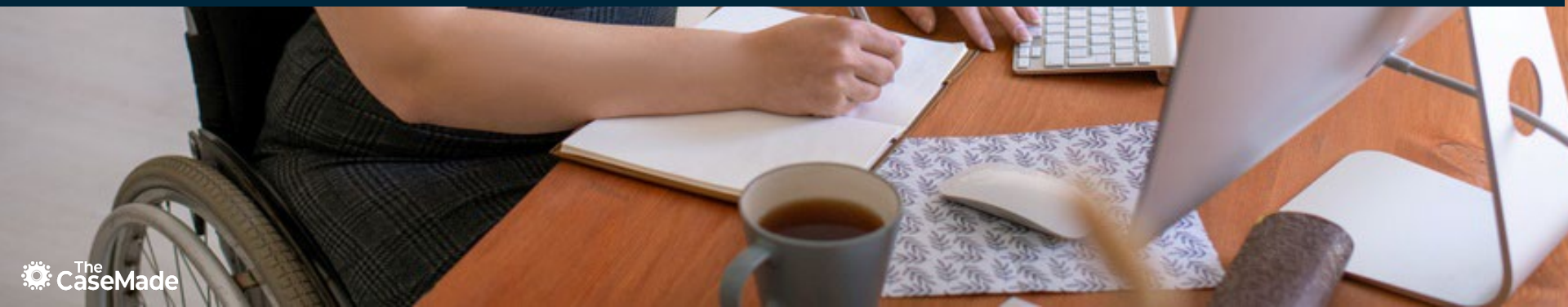
The more we listen to and invite all kinds of people to tell all their different kinds of stories - without judgement - the more champions we'll have.

We need to get radically inclusive to build the support we need to scale our solutions!



2

Preparing Your Ground Game



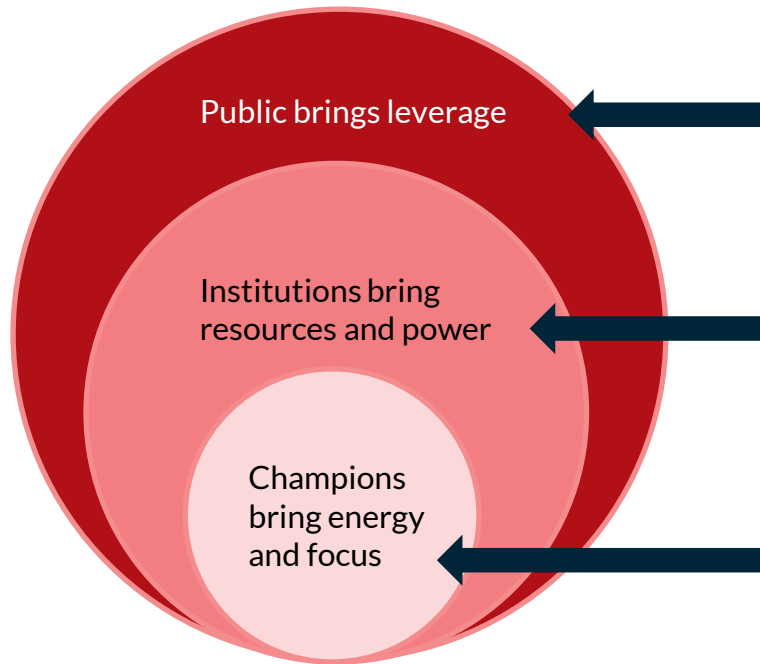


To redesign our systems to end homelessness and achieve an abundance of housing, we need to activate many different kinds of stakeholders at different levels of power to join us for the long haul.

Our job as skilled CaseMakers is to understand the broadest universe of people we need on our side, paint a compelling picture of a shared future that they all would want to be a part of, and begin to strategically engage them.

How do we reach beyond our usual champions and activate different stakeholders across our communities? Understanding the universe of people we need on our side is where we must start our will-building ground game.

Make a list! Who do you need to end homelessness and achieve abundant housing?



People with lived expertise, residents, voters, taxpayers, homeowners, parishioners, seniors, immigrant communities, environmentalists, etc.

Governments, government agencies, healthcare institutions, large employers, faith-based institutions, unions, community foundations, financial institutions, real estate and housing developers, school districts, universities, service, charitable and environmental organizations, student groups, neighborhood associations, etc.

Your staff and board, key elected officials, people with lived expertise, key business leaders, key faith leaders, key health leaders, respected community elders or neighborhood leaders, school superintendent or university chancellors, key youth leaders, key advocates or organizers, key social media influencers, etc.

A strong ground game means thinking strategically about the order in which you begin activating the potential champions in your community to build credibility and momentum for your efforts. It's time to get strategic about who you are going to make your case to first, second, third, and so on.

These questions might help:

- What identities, expertise, and experiences should be represented early on?
- Who will be skilled at helping you identify gaps in your early thinking?
- Who will be the easy early adopters of your cause?
- Who will lend you credibility?
- Who has a big voice or influence?
- Who has strong organizing or coalition building skills?



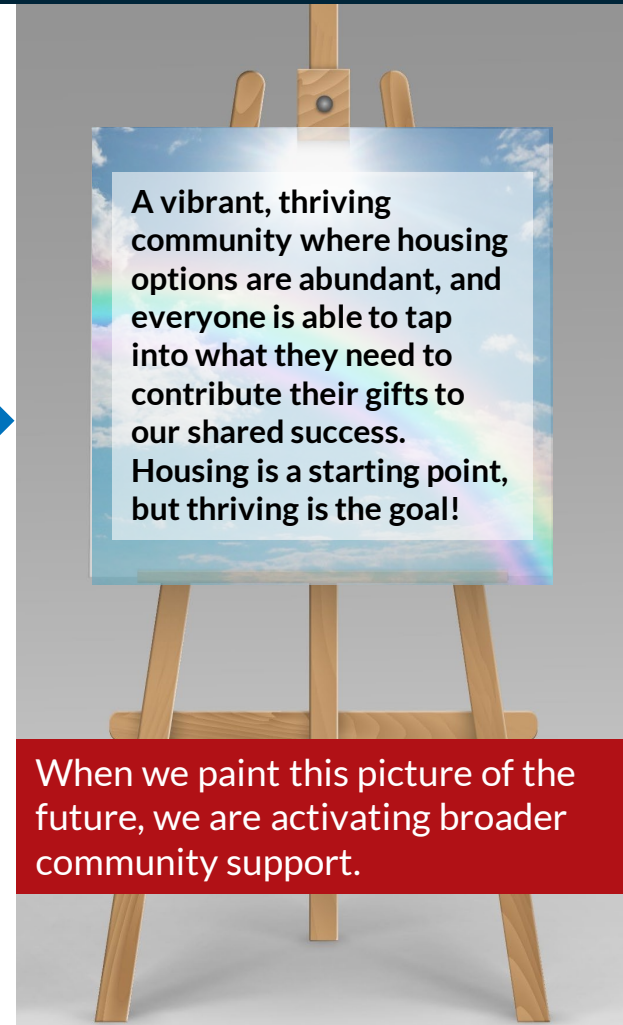
To activate a broader group of people, we have to help them see their stake in a future where housing is abundant. That means painting a clear and vivid picture of what that future looks like.



A wooden easel holds a painting of a multi-story brick building with a white entrance. A semi-transparent white text box is overlaid on the painting.

A robust, well-functioning, and equitable homelessness services system grounded in Housing First.

When we paint this picture of the future, we are activating our closest supporters.



A wooden easel holds a painting of a bright, colorful rainbow against a blue sky with white clouds. A semi-transparent white text box is overlaid on the painting.

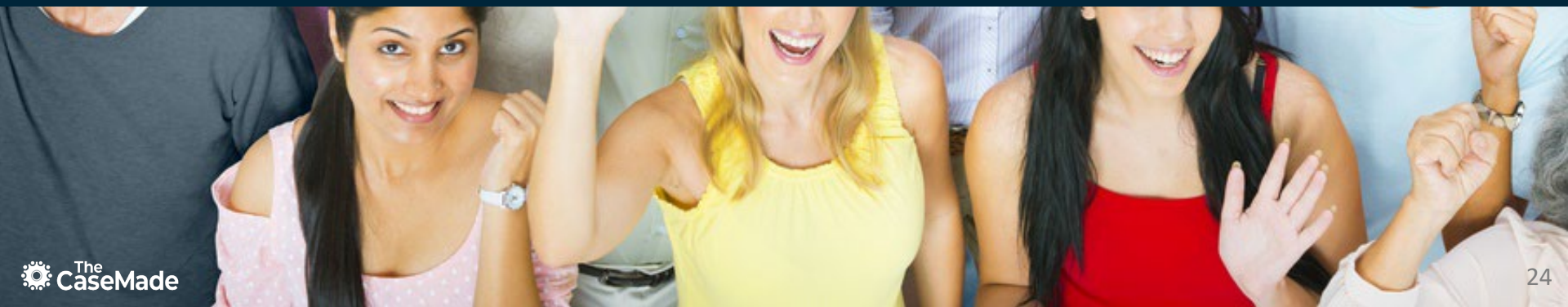
A vibrant, thriving community where housing options are abundant, and everyone is able to tap into what they need to contribute their gifts to our shared success. Housing is a starting point, but thriving is the goal!


When we paint this picture of the future, we are activating broader community support.



3

Activating New Champions



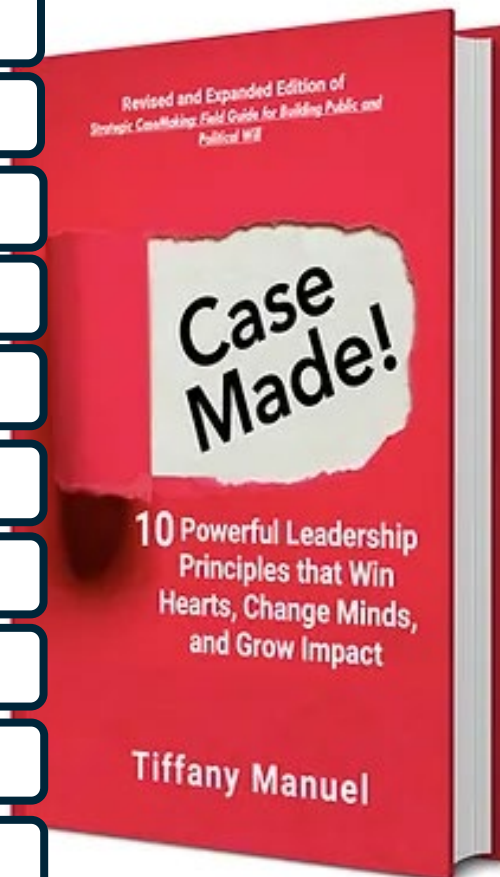
A close-up of a silver microphone on a stand, positioned in the foreground. The background is a large, out-of-focus crowd of people in a well-lit room, possibly a conference or meeting. The lighting is warm, with some bright spots from overhead lights.

Now that you understand who you want to activate, and some of how they currently think about homelessness and housing, you are ready to start building your case.

Our job as CaseMakers is to deepen our understanding of the leadership principles that, based on social and cognitive science, build support for long-term change.

30 years of strong social science and community practice are compiled into the 10 principles of Strategic CaseMaking™

- 1 Connect your work to people's aspirations
- 2 Name the power of the moment to shape the future
- 3 Tell people what they lose if they sit on the sidelines
- 4 Navigate dominant narratives
- 5 Anchor and credential solutions, not problems
- 6 Make inequitable systems the villain
- 7 Tell the 'story of us'
- 8 Foster collective ownership
- 9 Reimagine your value proposition
- 10 Share your roadmap & metrics for success



Think Leadership, Not Messaging

The 10 principles of Strategic CaseMaking make up a skillset that all leaders – resident leaders, community leaders, institutional leaders, government and corporate leaders – need to make the strongest case for the system changes that will get us to a better future.

On the pages that follow, we've provided some context for each leadership principle – the “why.” And we offer sample language – the “how” – so you can begin to recognize and think about strong CaseMaking.

The sample language focuses on ending homelessness specifically and on abundant housing more generally. Because to succeed in ending homelessness, we must activate the public to help us reimagine and rebuild our entire housing system.

We hope you'll think of the principles as scaffolding to build on as you engage your stakeholders around the specific work you're doing. Make the principles your own, giving them the benefit of the time, patience, and practice that your justice journey deserves.

Think ASSETS, not deficits

Think PEOPLE-centered systems, not organizations

Think JUSTICE, not equality

Think SOLUTIONS, not problems

Think ABUNDANT HOUSING, not only ending homelessness

Principle #1

Help people make the connection between their own aspirations for themselves, their families, and their communities and the work to end to homelessness and enrich our neighborhoods with abundant housing

Why This Matters

If you were to ask the people you listed in response to the question on page 19 what their biggest aspirations for the future are — and you should! — ending homelessness probably wouldn't show up. Maybe, for them, it's clean air, or great schools, or a stronger economy. Or finding the perfect house to raise their kids. To activate them, you have to help them see the clear connection between THEIR aspirations and your work to create more abundant housing for everyone — starting with those who need it most, those without shelter today.

To make these connections authentically, always start by listening to those with lived experience as well as other stakeholders in the community. [Learn more about listening differently.](#)

What Practiced CaseMaking Sounds Like

- ❖ *No matter who we are or where we come from, we all want to live a life that gives us joy, connects us to the things that keep us healthy, and offers us a comforting place to lay our heads at night. We all want to live in enriching communities that offer abundant housing — no matter how much we earn or the kinds of difficulties we may have faced in the past. We all deserve a shot at a great life ... that's what I'm working toward.*
- ❖ *We all want our kids to get a great education that sets them up for a successful future. But it's hard for teachers and schools to provide that path to academic success when so many students don't have a stable place to live that allows them to show up rested and ready to learn. For all our kids and classrooms to focus on learning, we've got to solve for housing instability.*
- ❖ *Like many of my neighbors, I'm supporting solutions to homelessness so that young people growing up today don't miss the opportunity to enjoy outdoor public space the way we did when I was young. I think we all want our kids and future generations to have access to green space, public sidewalks, and outdoor entertainment. But in many places across the country, it's getting harder to do that. I'm dreaming of a world where our kids can experience open space, and our neighbors struggling to find shelter can find ample, abundant housing here.*

Principle #2

Help people understand why this moment is ripe for meaningful action that helps end homelessness and leads to the future we all want for our communities

Why This Matters

Everywhere we turn these days, we are being asked to ACT NOW on the latest crisis – whether sending money, signing petitions, or giving time to advocacy campaigns or volunteer efforts. The problem is that the human brain is wired for optimism, so the chronic drumbeat of negative appeals feels ever more overwhelming and discourages people from engaging more deeply when we need them to. To energize the stakeholders we need, we must activate their optimism for the future they can start building now.

What Practiced CaseMaking Sounds Like

- ❖ *With record investments across the state and so many people motivated to end homelessness once and for all, there's never been a better moment for us to lean forward to end homelessness. The pandemic, the state of our economy, and a whole series of looming challenges necessitate that we get this done – for the benefit of the thousands who remain unsheltered and those who are already stably housed. We have a stake in each other's success. Now is the time to show it!*
- ❖ *When I think about the future of this community, I don't want to leave homelessness as a continuing challenge that burdens the next generation. I want us to model for them how we come together and operate with compassion and out of a sense of shared fate. Every decision we make today shapes the future of this community. Let's figure this out. Let's act in solidarity and make it possible for people from all walks of life to live here and thrive here.*
- ❖ *We've spent the last several years strengthening our community's ability to end homelessness so that we are poised and ready for the investments that are coming now. We know that there's never been a more important moment to make the investments we need to get us to the future we all want, and we are prepared to make them together.*

Principle #3

Help people understand what they will lose, individually and collectively, if they don't join the effort to end homelessness and create abundant housing now

Why This Matters

Most of us fear change — especially if we don't control the circumstances of the change around us. When we do contemplate a different future, we try to minimize what we think we stand to lose if those changes take place. It's human nature.

But if we stick with the status quo, we never lean into the powerful possibility of what tomorrow could deliver: a reimagined housing system that transforms all our lives for the better. To help people navigate their natural fears of change and loss, we have to remind them what will be lost if they don't join the work to ensure that everyone has an amazing, thriving future.

What Practiced CaseMaking Sounds Like

- ❖ *If we don't act now to make more abundant housing opportunities available to people with no or limited income, we'll lose the ability to shape the development of our community's housing. People who are struggling to find housing in our community will be forced to live without shelter in greater numbers. The calls to criminalize homelessness will grow. It doesn't have to be like this. Let's not let more people fall into homelessness or fail to lift everyone out of it — especially when we have the tools today to solve this in a thoughtful way.*
- ❖ *If we don't make the investments we need to keep our unsheltered neighbors and friends safely here, we will lose all the ways they enrich our communities. Let's not miss out on that because of short-sighted, knee-jerk fixes that don't see our unsheltered neighbors are people with unique strengths and gifts to offer. They deserve better and so do we!*

Principle #4

Carefully prepare for the dominant narratives and negative disruptors that we know come up in every conversation about homelessness

Why This Matters

Earlier, we describe some of the ways that our attempts to build public will around ending homelessness conflict with the ways that a vast majority of people naturally think about homelessness. We won't succeed in building broader support unless we diligently and collectively prepare for those reactions, using all our CaseMaking strategies to reframe and/or pivot around them. It's one of the most powerful things we can do to keep people focused on our solutions! [Learn more about developing a pivot strategy.](#)

What Practiced CaseMaking Sounds Like

- ❖ *[In response to a comment about mental health] Thanks for bringing that up! All you have to do is read the news to see that mental health is a challenge for lots of people in our community and in our nation today. None of us is exempt from needing mental or emotional supports at some point in our lives. And some of us really do require more support to maintain meaningful community connections, jobs, and housing. Acknowledging this doesn't negate the need for housing – actually, it only supports the need for housing first! With housing in place, we're better able to deliver the mental health supports people need. That's why we've made those investments an important part of our plan to end homelessness. We totally agree: mental health is important for all of us!*
- ❖ *[In response to a comment about people "choosing" to live outside] I agree that most people want to choose where they live. I know I want to live near my family, my work, the bus line, and my church. The big challenge we ALL face is that the availability of the housing we want is often in limited supply. As we begin to create more abundant housing, more people will have the option of housing that provides the community they want and need. That's what these investments will do.*

Principle #5

Anchor people in the solutions to homelessness rather than using time and resources to raise awareness for an already well-known problem

Use all the creativity of your data and storytelling to show the benefits of abundant housing

Why This Matters

Most of us have been trained to build support for our work by repeatedly highlighting the size and extent of the problem we're trying to solve. While tracking data is key for accountability and right-sizing our community response, it can easily backfire when we don't take the time to frame it thoughtfully. That's because the data we use – which is largely negative – “anchors” people in pessimism, fatalism and bias. That kind of deficit framing about problems makes it nearly impossible to move people into the headspace of optimism or meaningful action.

Instead, we need to get good at anchoring our conversations in our well-proven solutions, and use all the power of our data, images, storytelling and art to show the different ways that we all benefit when homelessness is ended. [Learn more about anchoring solutions.](#)

What Practiced CaseMaking Sounds Like

- ❖ *Preventing homelessness, and addressing it quickly when it occurs, is the single best investment we can make in this community right now.*
- ❖ *Providing housing saves lives. Studies show that when unsheltered people get access to housing, they can live longer, fuller lives. Let's start to track how many more birthdays our unsheltered neighbors celebrate once they get access to housing. That's the data that speaks to our true impact!*
- ❖ *Our focus on preventing homelessness means that #__ of children in this community will not have to move schools in the middle of their semesters because their families were stably housed. And our data shows that their academic progress is stabilized and on par with other students in their grades. Teachers get to do their best work when students are stably housed and the work of school administrators gets easier as well.*
- ❖ *Our municipal bond rating goes up when we focus on housing stability. That means there are economic benefits to all of us by preventing and addressing housing instability, homelessness, and evictions.*

Principle #6

Make inequitable systems visible and make **them** the villain in the story

Highlight how racial and economic inequities have been built into our systems and how we must redesign them

Why This Matters

From our founding myths to what we're bingeing on TV today, Americans connect deeply to rags-to-riches tales. Yet, these narratives of individualism, and often, racial difference, challenge our work to end homelessness. Why? Because they crowd out people's ability to see the underlying systems that determine our success.

Racism against Black people, Indigenous people and other people of color, has been deeply embedded into our homelessness and housing systems for decades. Blaming individual actors, like billionaires or landlords, for those failings can play on people's outrage and get us some quick wins, but they can also distract from our long-term system change goal. Instead, we've got to help people see, blame and reimagine systems. [Learn more about systems storytelling.](#)

What Practiced CaseMaking Sounds Like

Where we live shapes every aspect of our lives: how we connect to jobs, schools, faith institutions, and the things that keep us healthy. Not to mention how we grow our talents, skills and opportunities to give back. If we want to ensure that we all have access to stable homes in thriving communities, we have to connect to the drivers that make opportunity possible: systems! When those systems operate fairly, we all benefit.

Yet, the housing and other systems we inherited were designed in a different time. They were built to ensure that some people are well-connected to resources, while others, especially people of color and people living with disabilities, are actively harmed. In 2023, there has to be a better way to make sure all of us have access to what we need for long-term health and wellbeing. That's why we're working with you to reimagine our housing system to end homelessness and benefit all of us.

Our housing system operates like an old car that is badly in need of repair. It works sometimes, for some people, but then breaks down and leaves many of us stranded on the side of the road! And help never arrives. But it doesn't have to stay this way. We can replace or repair the car. The only option we shouldn't choose is to continue to leave our neighbors stranded.

Principle #7

Tell the “story of us” so that more people see their stake in ending homelessness

Why This Matters

We need as many champions as we can get to end homelessness. Every part of our community must understand their role in the causes and solutions. Yet when we talk about homelessness, it is rare to see anyone besides our unsheltered neighbors in the story. Centering the voices of those most affected is important, but when others are not in the story, we leave it to them to guess their role—or prefer to be left out.

We have to broaden the stories we tell to show how ending homelessness takes all of us, rowing in the same direction, as well as how it shapes our communities for the better. Our goal is to make anyone who will listen a champion of this work and a hero in our story about ending homelessness and building communities with an abundance of housing.

What Practiced CaseMaking Sounds Like

Who benefits from helping people stay stably housed and rooted to the fabric of our community? We all do!

- *From the hospitals, grocery stores, banks, and other local employers who need to ensure a strong workforce;*
- *To the parents who need childcare, the lounges that need bands, the coffee shops that need baristas, the galleries that need art;*
- *To the congregations that need their faithful and civic groups that need volunteers;*
- *To the friends who need their peers with whom they can learn and grow;*
- *To the grandkids that need their grandparents and the college students that want to come home.*

We are all champions in a story that makes abundant housing possible, feasible, and a reality.

Principle #8

Foster collective ownership of the solutions by lifting up community power and success

Why This Matters

In the face of big challenges like homelessness, most people feel powerless to make a difference. And it's easy to assign sole responsibility — and blame — to government. Then, people rail against a government that seems unwilling (or unable) to solve the insurmountable challenge we assigned to it. They say: *Why can't you just move people into shelters? Why can't our leaders do something about this?*

A lot of good social science and years of community practice tell us we have to help people reconnect to their power, their strength, and their sense of belonging. The easiest way to do that is reminding people of times and places where people in their community sought and won extraordinary things. [Learn more about talking people into their power.](#)

What Practiced CaseMaking Sounds Like

- ❖ *Despite the hardships we've faced, this community has always been an extraordinary place where people take care of each other. When the pandemic shuttered our industry and so many of us were out of work, we checked on our neighbors, we came together to make sure people could pay their rent until those jobs returned, and we did our best to keep things normal for our kids. Now that the pandemic is waning, we can't let that energy fade. We need to direct it at long-term solutions to homelessness. We refuse to go back to a time when our neighbors were struggling to stay housed. We've come too far to go back to "business as usual" in this community!*
- ❖ *We all know how much potential our community has. We attract so many people who are artists, singers, coders, technologists, and more. That's why we've come together to fund and build so many art spaces and community theaters over the last few years. They make our community stronger, and so do strong services and supports that prevent homelessness. Let's take the same energy we've used to build our cultural resources and pour them into the work to end homelessness. This issue is no less important, and it needs our voices to break through. We get to decide how to get this done, and we get to do it together!*

Principle #9

Be clear that people understand your organization's role and value proposition

Take the time to build trust in your leadership

Why This Matters

Most people in the public don't have much experience with the organizations that are working to end homelessness – beyond a general feeling from their day-to-day lives or the news that things are either going well or they are going poorly. When pressed to name who is leading the work and what needs to be done for it to succeed, most people either draw a blank or offer “quick fixes” that often involve police departments and criminalizing homelessness.

To convince partners and the public to invest their resources at the scale we need to end homelessness – and to avoid losing ground to interests that are actively seeking to damage our credibility – we need to get much better at building trust in our leadership through a strong value proposition. [Learn more about reimagining your value proposition.](#)

What Practiced CaseMaking Sounds Like

Our organization believes that everyone should have a safe, healthy, accessible and affordable home in communities they choose. And we've been listening to and working side-by-side with community residents to achieve that vision since 1995.

- ❖ *We're the only group that represents the entire homelessness service ecosystem and more than 1,000 members.*
- ❖ *We're a trusted convener and consensus builder to a wide range of interests making sure that our resources are invested in smart policies.*
- ❖ *We work directly with residents to strengthen their housing stability through eviction prevention, rental assistance, housing navigation, supportive services, employment connections, and home-buying assistance.*
- ❖ *Our board and leadership reflects people with lived experience.*

We need your help to give us the scale of resources necessary to meet the growing need. Will you join us in leadership to do that?

Principle #10

Design your strategic roadmap with the allies you need in mind. Share them in ways that show them why your success is their success.

Why This Matters

It's hard to get people on your journey if they don't know the destination, when they've arrived, or what landmarks they'll see along the way. That's especially true for complex system-change issues like ending homelessness, when even our closest partners aren't even sure they want to be on the journey with us.

Too often, we write our strategic roadmaps for ourselves, describing our goals and metrics in ways that don't align with the goals and aspirations of our critical partners in other systems or to the public at large. And when we report on our progress – if we do at all – we make the same mistake of assuming that they'll care. We have to write our roadmaps, metrics, progress reports, and updates with the people we need by our side at the forefront.

[Learn how to build a strategic plan with CaseMaking in mind.](#)

What Practiced CaseMaking Sounds Like

We all benefit when the strong, resilient people who make up our community are able to stay rooted and give back. Our bold plan allows us to meet needs of the people who live here and create opportunities to keep people in the homes and communities they love.

Through a \$200 million investment of public and private resources over ten years, we will ensure 2,000 of our seniors, neighbors, and friends have the stability they need through a strong, coordinated crisis response system, intensive assistance for those who are most vulnerable, and housing support and help connecting to services and income.

Our focus on equity allows us to track our data across race, income, ability status, orientation, and more. We know that all people are served equally by our housing, and we want to be sure that we have to data to assess who may be left out or who is not receiving supports as quickly or comprehensively as others.



Putting It Together



Now that you are beginning to familiarize yourself with the "why" and "how" of CaseMaking, it's time to start practicing.

Our job as skilled CaseMakers is to find opportunities big and small to begin shifting the conversations we are in, while also creating space to bring new people into our conversations.

Imagery Tips

Imagery is a powerful tool to enhance your CaseMaking. It helps your potential champions make an emotional connection to the future you are striving for and it casts them as heroes in the story. Poorly chosen imagery can send the folks you need back into “bystander” mode by making them feel othered, demoralized, or disconnected from the issue and their role in it.

Avoid This

- Avoid showing only the people you are trying to directly help. Many people in our communities are impacted by the limited availability of housing. Those folks need to see themselves reflected in the stories we are telling!
- Avoid dark, grainy, dull, or black and white images, unless this is a creative choice. It reinforces the negative images people already have in their heads.
- Avoid showing rundown places or people in crisis in isolation. The public perception of homelessness is already negative. Help people lean into joy!
- Avoid focusing only on the “problem” of homelessness. Show vibrant places where solutions are driving the work!



Try This Instead

- Show images of all the different champions that you need on your side. Be radically inclusive in your visuals!
- Show diversity within images, as well as diverse images. We all benefit when we are in community together!
- Tap into people’s aspirations for the future with brightness, energy, and hope.
- Remind people of the strength, joy, and resilience of the people and places around them with real-life photos of the things they know and love.

Storytelling Tips

Our brains are literally wired for stories, which means that our storytelling – whether through art, spoken word, journalism, or marketing – can powerfully help or hinder our ability to build support for long-term systems change. As you and your allies craft and share stories about ending homelessness, keep these tips in mind.

Don't Do This

- X Tell stories that nobody wants to see themselves in
- X Lead with the problem
- X Talk only about the past
- X Describe people on their worst day
- X Deficit frame our community and dwell on what's wrong
- X Describe successes or failures of individual people

Try This Instead

- ✓ Tell stories that people want to be a part of! Where we all get to be heroes in the solutions!
- ✓ Lead with the solution
- ✓ Evoke a shared future
- ✓ Describe people's dignity, joy, and resilience
- ✓ Asset frame our community and remind people of what they love about our community
- ✓ Describe the power of the systems that shape us

Data Tips

Whether point-in-time counts, HMIS, or by-name lists, homelessness leaders have a good amount of data at their fingertips to make the case for their work. Unfortunately, problem-focused data often backfires in the public conversation, entrenching bias and depressing support. Instead, we need solution-focused data to build our case that ending homelessness benefits everyone.

Instead of this...	Try this...
On any given night, 300 people in our community sleep in places not meant for human habitation.	When we work together to solve homelessness, we gain 300 more neighbors who can experience the joy of thriving here and contribute their strengths here. And we get to experience what resilience looks like in our community.
You have to make 125% of AMI to even afford a place to live here, when “affordability” means paying no more than 30% of your income on rent.	When we focus on ending homelessness, we work together to bring rents down, provide better housing options, and do something meaningful about the problems most of us are concerned about. As rents get more affordable for everyone, we may even see more opportunities for our loved ones, our own kids and grandkids, as well as teachers, nurses, and fire fighters, to live here.
Throughout the 2022-2023 school year, 1,089 students experienced homelessness in our state.	We all want our children to do well in school. When our children do well, we get a new generation of leaders in our community. Because we are working together to solve homelessness, more than 1,000 students, their classmates, and teachers will have the stability they need to build thriving classrooms for all our kids and nurture the leaders for tomorrow that we desperately need in our nation today.
People who experience homelessness die nearly 30 years earlier than the average American.	Ending homelessness and creating more abundant housing opportunities for our neighbors improves health and wellbeing. Those who are no longer experiencing homelessness get to live decades longer, enjoy more birthdays with their loved ones, and experience the full lives that we all want for ourselves.

Social Media Tips

Social media can be a great learning lab for CaseMaking. It allows you to ask questions and listen to the aspirations of different groups of community members in the places where they naturally congregate – and speak their minds – online. And it allows you a low-pressure way to practice and test your CaseMaking approaches in real time to reframe the conversation. Here are some examples.

Now is the time to decide our future! What do love about living here that you want to be able to leave for your grandkids, colleagues, and friends?

Tapping into aspirations

No matter where you come from or what your background is, you are welcome here! When we make sure all kinds of people can live in our community, we all win!

Collective responsibility

We all benefit when we come together, prevent homelessness, and make sure abundant housing opportunities exist. Imagine how much stronger our classrooms will be when all kids have a good night's sleep!

Anchoring solutions

Will we look back in 20 years knowing that we took decisive action to secure the future of the place we all love? Or will our inaction resign our neighbors to growing hardship? How we respond matters!

Tell people what they lose

Let's offer more opportunities for our seniors to stay here and for our children to put down roots here. We're making sure we have plenty of safe, stable, affordable housing for thriving people!

Tell the "story of us"

Our report card is in! Check out how our community is making progress on ending homelessness and creating more abundant housing opportunities for everyone!

Show your roadmap

Putting It All Together – An Example

There are not many places in the world like ours, where you'll find so many people in one place striving for a better life, working hard to design a better future for their own lives, and determined to build community with the people they meet here. In the arts, entertainment, technology, environment – heck, in all parts of our lives – our creativity and innovation are matched only by our ambition to keep pushing forward to something better.

There's never been a more important moment to secure our future by investing in housing. It's no secret that Our City is facing some tough challenges. Housing is growing scarce, with the numbers of unsheltered people growing. COVID has weakened the vitality of our neighborhoods and people's connection to their housing. The urgent effects of global warming and economic recession are putting us all in jeopardy. And those dangers are felt most acutely by our deeply rooted Black and brown communities that have been systematically blocked from security and prosperity for decades.

How we respond now matters. Will we look back in 20 years knowing that we took decisive action to ensure abundant housing opportunities for our neighbors and loved ones? Or will we ignore their needs and resign them to long-term hardship? The good news is WE have the power to decide. The housing system we have was designed long ago to serve different interests, but we can redesign it to ensure abundant housing opportunities that move us confidently into the future. We know this transformation won't happen without us leaning in!

Can you spot the principles?

Tap into aspirations

Anchor solutions

Name the power of the moment

Introduce equity

Tell people what they will lose

Foster collective responsibility

Putting It All Together – Continued

Today, our housing systems work better if you are high-income and white than if you are low-income and Black or brown (and for a whole lot of folks who deserve better). That means the promise of a better life remains out of reach for too many. Some would say that's unfair, some would say that's discrimination at play, and others would simply say that it was racist and designed that way from the beginning to exclude the people who need it most. Whatever you call it, let's not take this into our future. Let's redesign our housing system so that it works for everybody.

Let our community be one of many that are leading the way in innovative solutions. **[Insert your community solutions here.]** Our community solutions are already working, but we need more scale to meet the full need. Through our collaboration and partnerships, we're turning the tide and working hard to figure out how to provide even more abundant housing options for all our seniors, neighbors, friends, and loved ones. We're strengthening our response to homelessness – including a strong, coordinated crisis response system, housing supports, intensive assistance for those who are most vulnerable, and connections to services, employment, and income.

Preventing and ending homelessness today by leaning into these solutions is like making a down payment on our future. No one-stop policy or investment of resources can solve it all, but we'll get a lot closer to rebuilding our housing system in the service of those who need it most when we start here. Join us! Learn more, advocate, and help us make more progress faster!

Can you spot the principles?

Make systems visible, make them the villain

Anchor solutions

Reimagine your value proposition

Tell the “story of us”

Show your roadmap

Foster collective responsibility

Cheat Sheet for Practicing Your CaseMaking Over Time

1. Help people make the connection between their own aspirations for themselves, their families, and their communities and an end to homelessness.
2. Help people understand why activating right now to end homelessness will get them to the future they want.
3. Help people understand what they will lose in their own lives if they don't join the work of ending homelessness now.
4. Carefully prepare for the dominant narratives and negative disrupters that we know come up in every conversation about homelessness.
5. Anchor people in the solutions to homelessness rather than using time and resources to raise awareness for an already well-known problem. Use all the creativity of your data and storytelling to show the benefits of ending homelessness.
6. Make inequitable systems visible and make them the villain in the story. Highlight how racial and economic inequities have been built into our systems and how we must redesign them.
7. Tell the “story of us” so that more people see their stake in ending homelessness.
8. Foster collective ownership of the solutions by lifting up community successes.
9. Be clear about your own value proposition to build trust in your leadership.
10. Share your roadmap for change and the metrics you'll used to measure what success looks like.

About Us

TheCaseMade was founded by social scientist Dr. Tiffany Manuel in 2019.

Our mission is to transform communities around the world by training leaders to build public will for reimagining and rebuilding systems with justice at the center.

We work across sectors like housing, health, education, economic development, and climate to help leaders learn the principles of Strategic CaseMaking™ and use them as tools for activating more people behind the cause of justice.

We provide leadership training, peer learning, research, and consulting to partners that include national philanthropies, state advocacy organizations, community coalitions, resident groups and local governments, among others.

Learn more at TheCaseMade.com.



Dr. Tiffany "DrT" Manuel
Founder and CEO of TheCaseMade

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Want to build your Strategic CaseMaking skills? Send a note to TalktoUs@TheCaseMade.com to find out about opportunities to learn and practice.

