

Making the Case *for* Government and the Revenues it Needs to do its Job Well

An essential task in difficult times

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**Public Works: the Dēmos Center
for the Public Sector**
www.publicworkspartners.net
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Public Works: the Dēmos Center for the Public Sector

Public support for a
government dedicated
to the common good
and empowered to
address the challenges
and opportunities of
the 21st Century.





**America is at a cross-roads:
Public Challenges and Public Will**



We need to change the terrain on which discussions about government occur



We need to change the terrain on which discussions about government occur

The Work of Public Works

Research

- Government
- The Economy
- Budgets & Taxes

In the Field

- Policy Shops
- Advocates
- Coalitions
- Electeds & Managers
- Unions

This is not about:

- “Liking” the government as it is, or telling people “government is good”
- Making excuses for government when it does not work
- “Big” government or “small” government

This is about:

- Recognizing the unique role of government in society
- Aspiring to create the government we need & deserve
- Public systems and structures that are essential to quality of life

What We are Trying to Understand

Polling:
Looking for Visible
Attitudes



Our Research:
Looking for Hidden
Reasoning



Framing Research

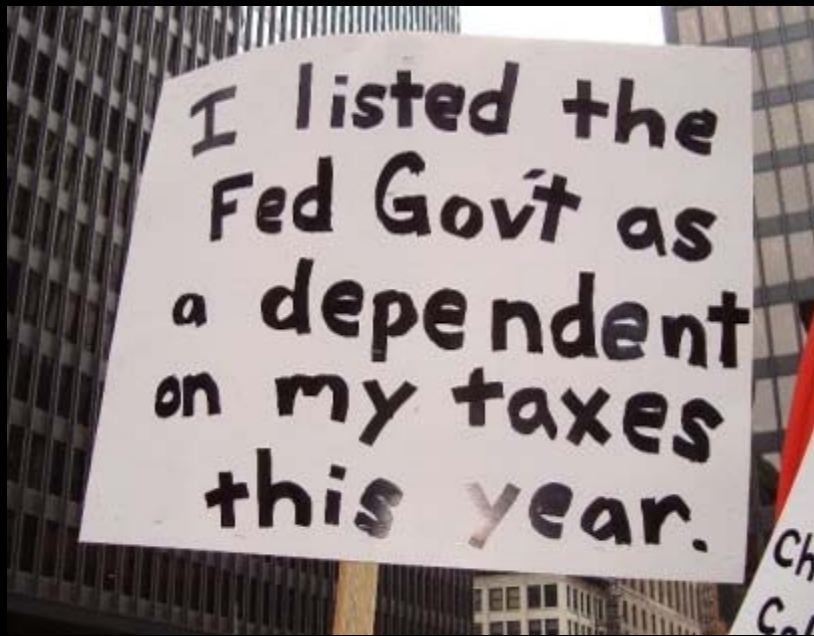
Framing research examines **how thinking, communication, and culture interact**, and understanding those interactions can help advocates determine how to communicate more effectively.

- Larry Wallack

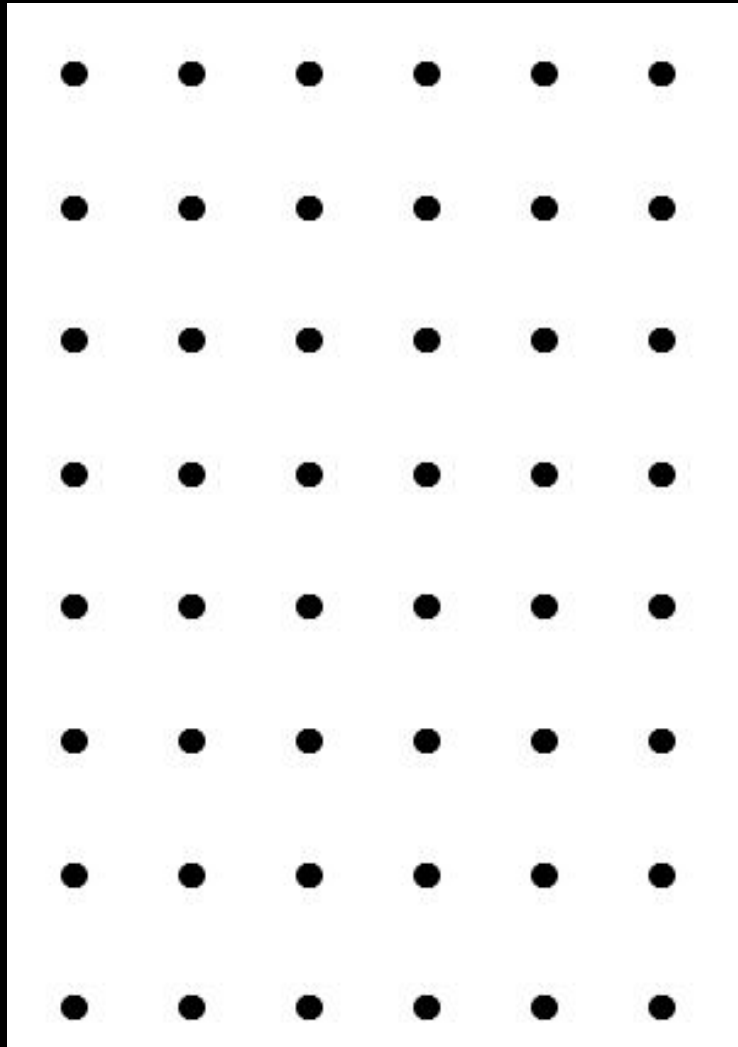
**Where we are
today . . .**

**IF GOVERNMENT IS
THE ANSWER, IT WAS
A STUPID QUESTION**

01/03/2010



The Task Before Us

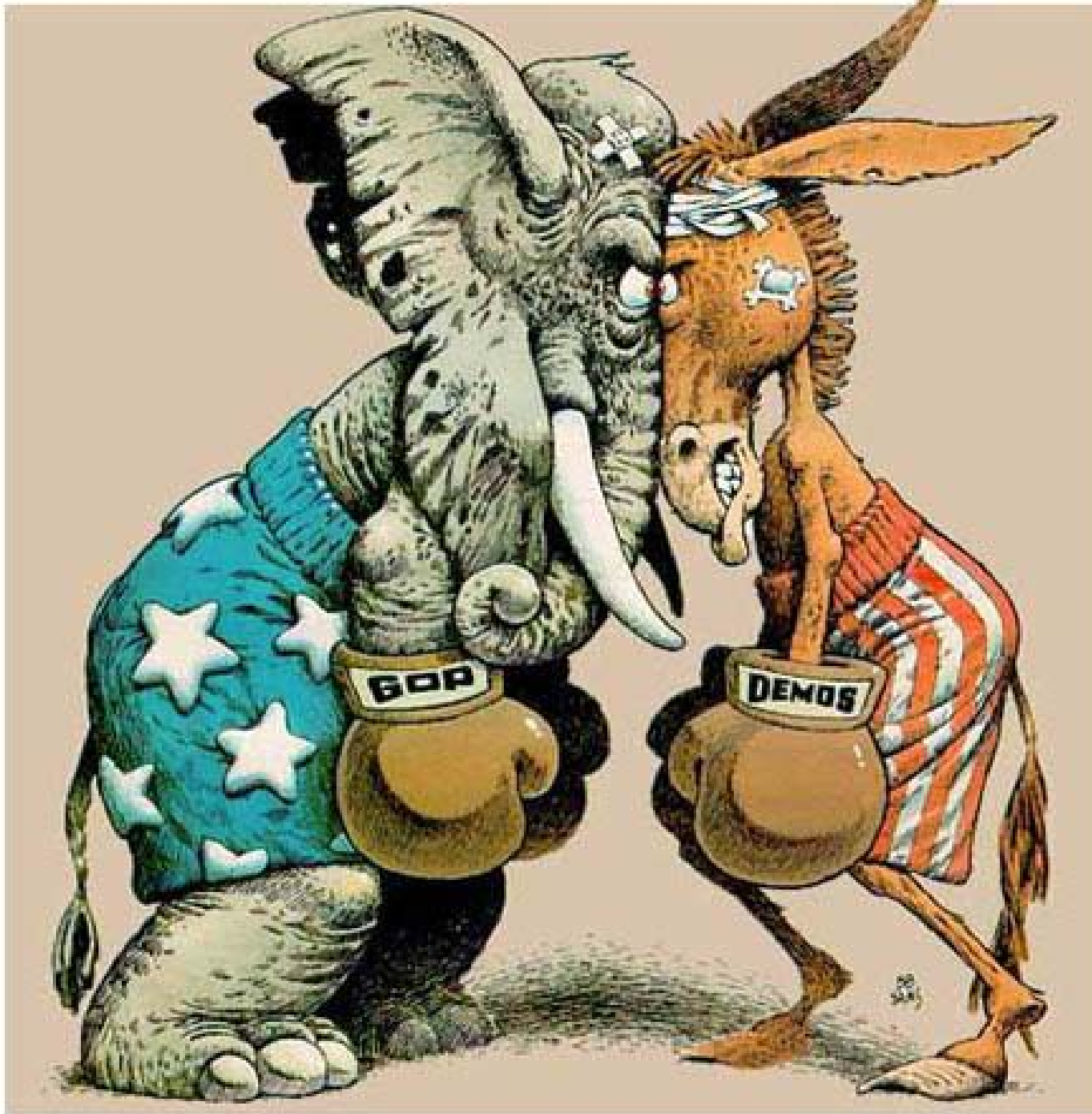


We must help Americans **reconnect the dots** between the shared **goals** and desires they have for their communities and the **public tools and resources** necessary to achieve them.

**But when we try to talk
about government . . .**

A black and white photograph of water droplets on a dark, reflective surface. The droplets are of various sizes and are arranged in vertical streaks, suggesting they have been running down the surface. The lighting creates highlights on the edges of the droplets, giving them a three-dimensional appearance.

GOVERNMENT



**GOV
PORK
& WASTE**

HURRY UP
AND SIGN THE
CHECK I'M
getting
hungry...

*Amoroso
Call for more of them*

!





The Challenge

- Dominant and Resilient images consistently misdirect thinking.
- Concrete images of the systems and structures of government are missing.
- Consumerist thinking narrows understanding and responsibility.

The Good News

- The “idea” of government is not lost
- Responsible citizenship is still valued
- A desire for collective action, respecting consensus, and problem-solving
- Stewardship and planning for the future – roles for government

Just Politics



"Bi-Partisan"
Steve Benezue

a partisan
blowhard
spectator
sport

Just Politics



"Bi-Partisan"
Steve Benezue



Mission and Purpose

Mission & Purpose



VALUES

- Common Good
- Quality of Life
- Community Wellbeing
- Public Purpose

ROLE

- Protector
- Manager & Planner
- Steward
- Consensus-BUILDER

Values Matter

- We reason first from deeply held values.
- Values help answer: “Why does this matter to me/us?”
- We need to start with **Values**, not with the policy and program details

Why does this matter?

“Every child should have access to immunizations but too many families in our community are not bringing their children in to our clinics. This is why we are proposing a new agency rule requiring more clinic hours . . .”

Speak to Values First

“The health of the whole community is **protected** when we ensure that our children are immunized. One of the ways we do this is through **our public health agencies** that provide free and low cost **immunizations for all children**. We need extended clinic hours to keep up with growing demands.”

Mindless Bureaucracy



**blurry and
undefined;
only dimly
understood**

Mindless Bureaucracy



Systems and Structures

Systems & Structures



- Concrete and vivid images
- The public systems we have created
- How they work
- Why they are important

Government as our Public Structures

The main advantages that make America so successful come from the **Public Structures** it has created. These Public Structures include the *physical* structures (highways, airports, and communications grids) and the *organizational* structures (the postal system, courts) we need to get things done, and the *social* support systems that help to ensure the health and well-being of our communities. It is our **well-functioning and supported** Public Structures that are essential for overall success.

Rounding Out the Story

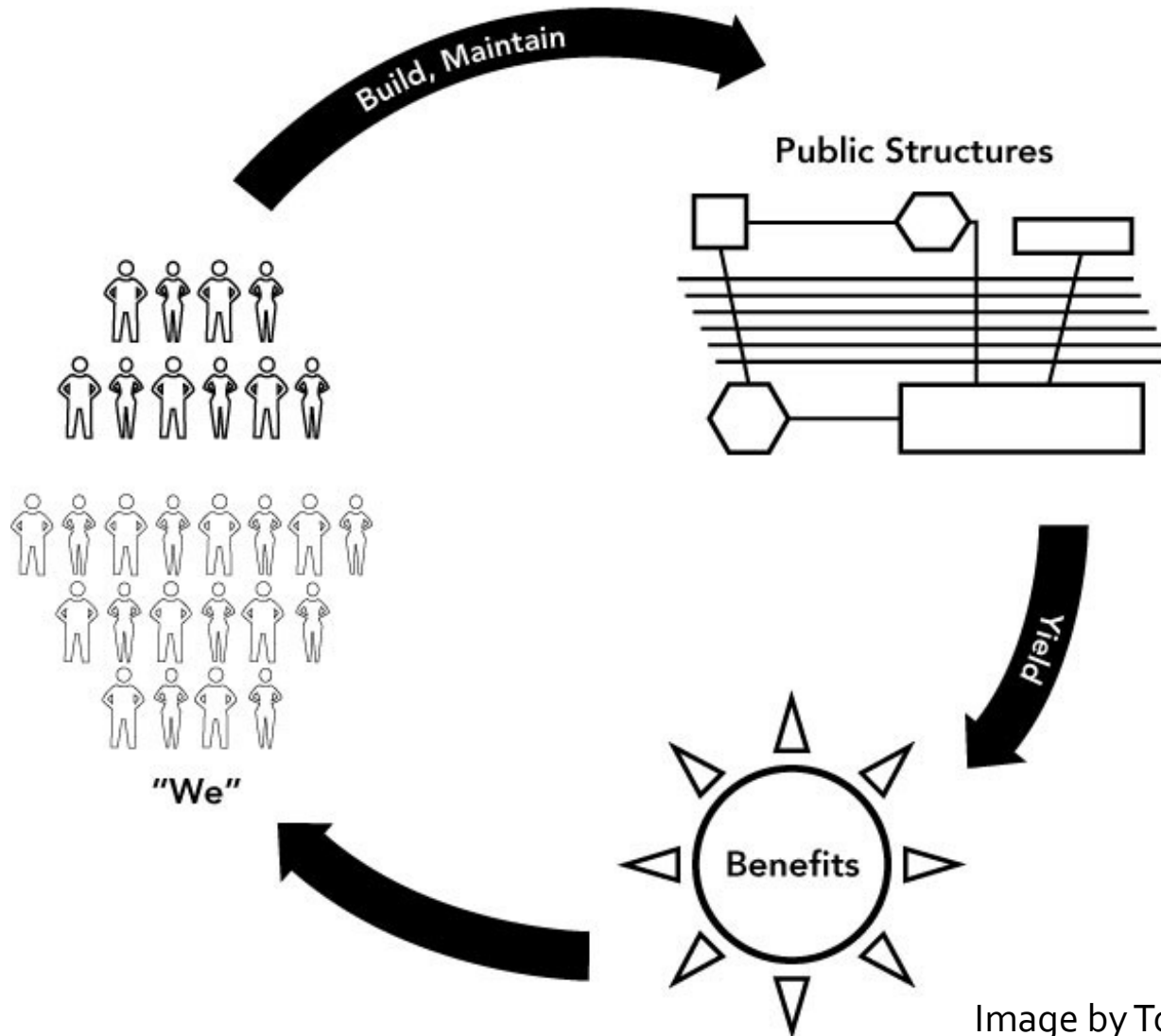


Image by Topos Partnership

“... it all comes down to whether you look out and see a nation of **consumers** or a nation of **citizens.**”
- *Bill Moyers*



Citizen Thinking



- Interdependence
- Working together
- Problem-solving
- Everyone has a role to play
- “Our” Government
- The Common Interest

Dominant Stories



Just Politics



Bureaucracy



Vending Machine

...can't solve anything . . . not my responsibility

New Stories



Mission & Purpose



Systems & Structures



Citizen-Thinking

... our tool for solutions & the common good ...



**Talking
about the
Need for
Revenue**

TAXES





“Legitimacy and a steady source of revenue provide the twin foundations of any enduring government.”

- Marjorie E. Kornhauser – “Legitimacy and the Right of Revolution: The Role of Tax Protests and Anti-Tax Rhetoric in America”

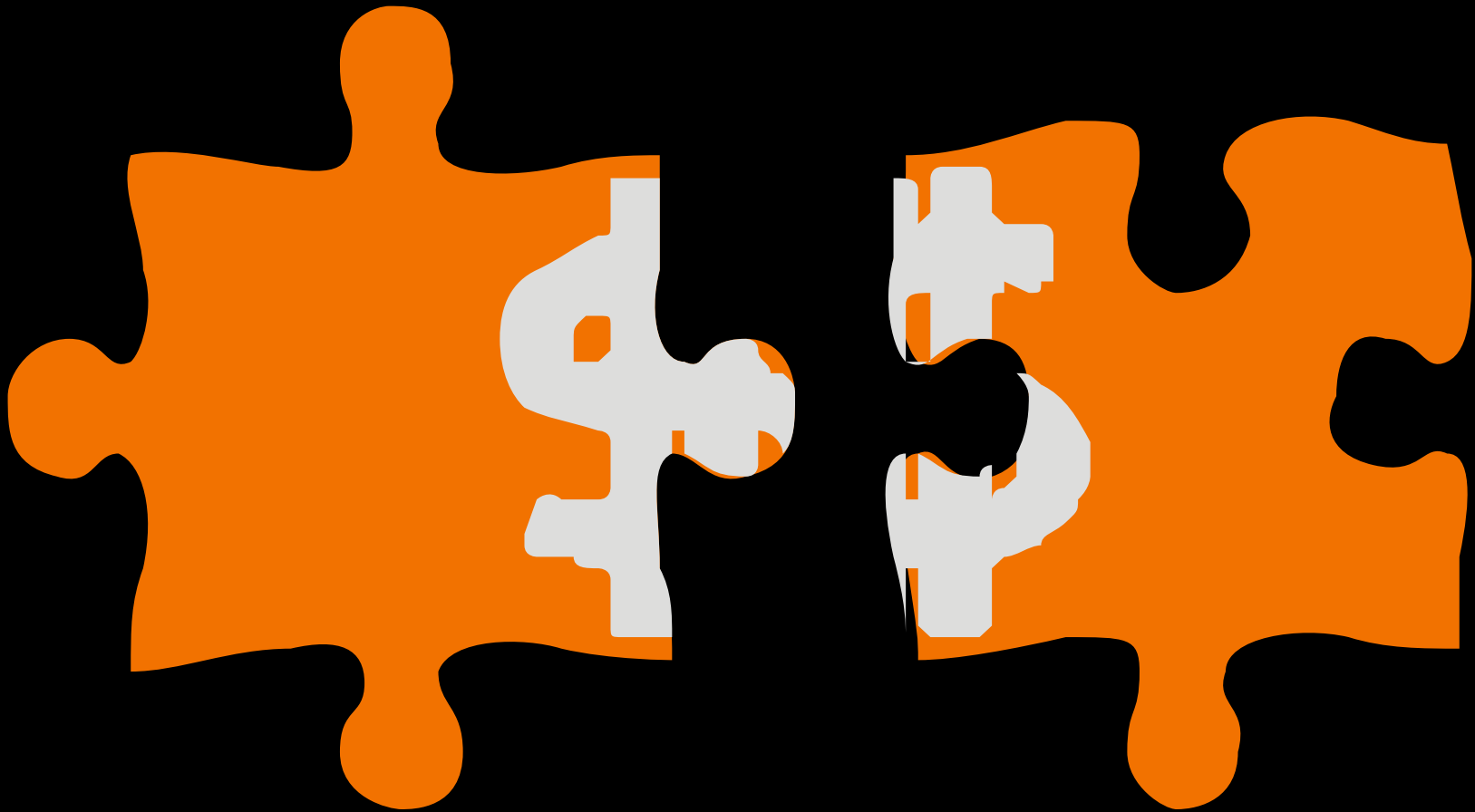
Tax Debates are Government Debates

- Tax debates and their overheated rhetoric transform government from “we the people” into “them,” the “other” – the taker of our money.
- Getting back to Government as “us” - as our tool for getting things done - is essential to winning on taxes.

Dominant
images of
Government
have a direct
influence on
attitudes about
Taxes







Taxes have become
disconnected from their **purposes.**



stoplight

power lines

traffic sign

NO
TURN
ON
RED

street sign

street light

phone lines

CUT TAXES
NOT
DEFENSE

STOP
TAXING
WELFARE
ZERO
TAXES

power for traffic light

road

sidewalk

Taxes = Expense



Taxes ≠ Benefit



Reclaiming the "T" Word

Values and Purposes

- Lead with **Common Good Values and Objectives** to set up tax conversations
- Focus on **Shared Priorities and Goals for the Future** to reconnect Taxes to Purposes
- Always **Connect Taxes to Budgets** – as mechanisms for achieving goals and priorities

Systems & Structures

- Connect the dots between the public systems and structures that underpin our quality of life, and the revenues from taxes that keep those systems functioning now and into the future.
- Take a pragmatic manager stance – taxes as tools

Civic Thinking

- From taxpaying consumers to “civic-minded” stewards of communities
- Taxes as our shared exchange with the future
- We all benefit when we support the public goods that create community wellbeing and a healthy economy
- Transparency and Participation

The **quality of life** we all want in our community is directly connected to **the public structures we build and maintain**. Our parks, schools, social services and infrastructure **are what make our community a good place to live and work**. Continuing cuts to public programs and services will undermine **the public systems we rely on every day**. It is time to focus on finding new revenue to keep our cities functioning well, now and into the future.

Don't Reinforce Bad Frames

Avoid these:

- Tax Burden
- Tax Relief
- Hard-earned tax dollars
- Taxpayer

Making the Case



- **Values:** Articulate the Public Good behind the policies and programs
- **System Thinking:** Help reveal our essential Public Systems & Structures
- **Awaken the Citizen:** What is our shared stake and responsibility?

“... A talent for speaking differently, rather than for arguing well, is the chief instrument of cultural change ...”

- Richard Rorty

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