REFRAMING AGING:

Changing the stories we tell about aging

LET'S AGREE!

- **No shame**

- **The research is the research**

- **You choose**

- **Plagiarize**

- **Share**

CHANGING
THE
NARRATIVE
ENDING AGEISM TOGETHER

WHY CHANGING THE NARRATIVE IS IMPORTANT

SO WHY YOU?

"We are the leaders we've been waiting for." Grace Lee Boggs

MANY VOICES, ONE CHOIR ©

WHAT ARE TWO STEREOTYPES
THAT THE GENERAL PUBLIC HAS ABOUT AGING AND OLDER PEOPLE?

"In Africa, when an elder dies, a library burns down."

RESEARCH FINDINGS: FIVE PATTERNS OF THINKING ABOUT AGING

Frameworks Institute, 2017

Ideal vs. perceived real

Us vs. them

Individualism

Nostalgia and threat of modernity

Solutions: individual, education, none

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AGEISM

Prejudice
Stereotyping
Discrimination

BASED ON AGE

HOW LIKELY IS IT THAT YOUR CONSTITUENTS HAVE EXPERIENCED AGEISM?

- **93%**
  Experienced one of more forms of ageism in day-to-day lives

  [Allen et al., 2022]

- **93%**
  Say workplace age discrimination is common

  [AARP, 2022]

- **56%**
  Of those entering 50s employment pushed out or laid off

  [Urban Institute, 2018]

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AGEISM NEGATIVELY AFFECTS US

- **Economic security**

- **Physical and mental health**

- **Memory**

- **How long we live**

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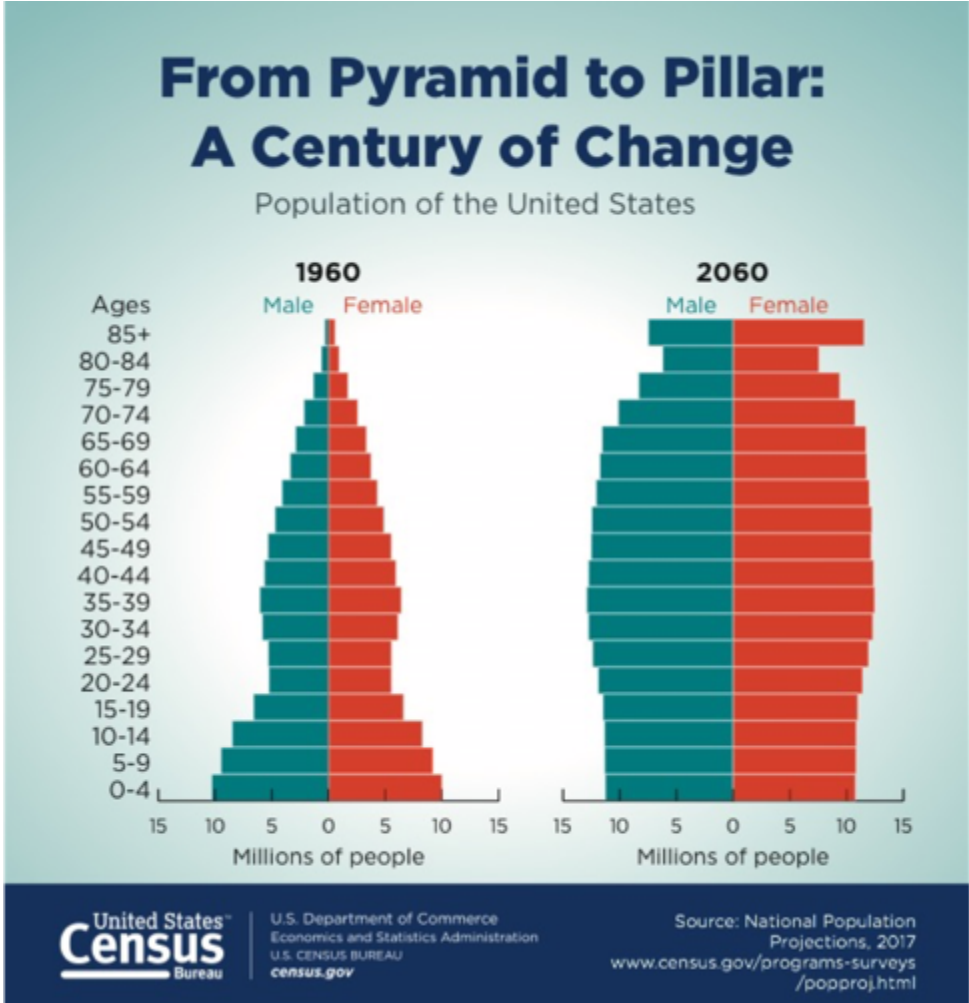
AND OUR COMMUNITIES AND ECONOMY

- **Less support for age-friendly policies and systems**

- **Lower funding for older adult programs**

- **$63 billion in annual health care costs**

- **Workplace age discrimination that costs economy $850 billion**

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THINKING POSITIVELY ABOUT AGING IS LINKED TO:
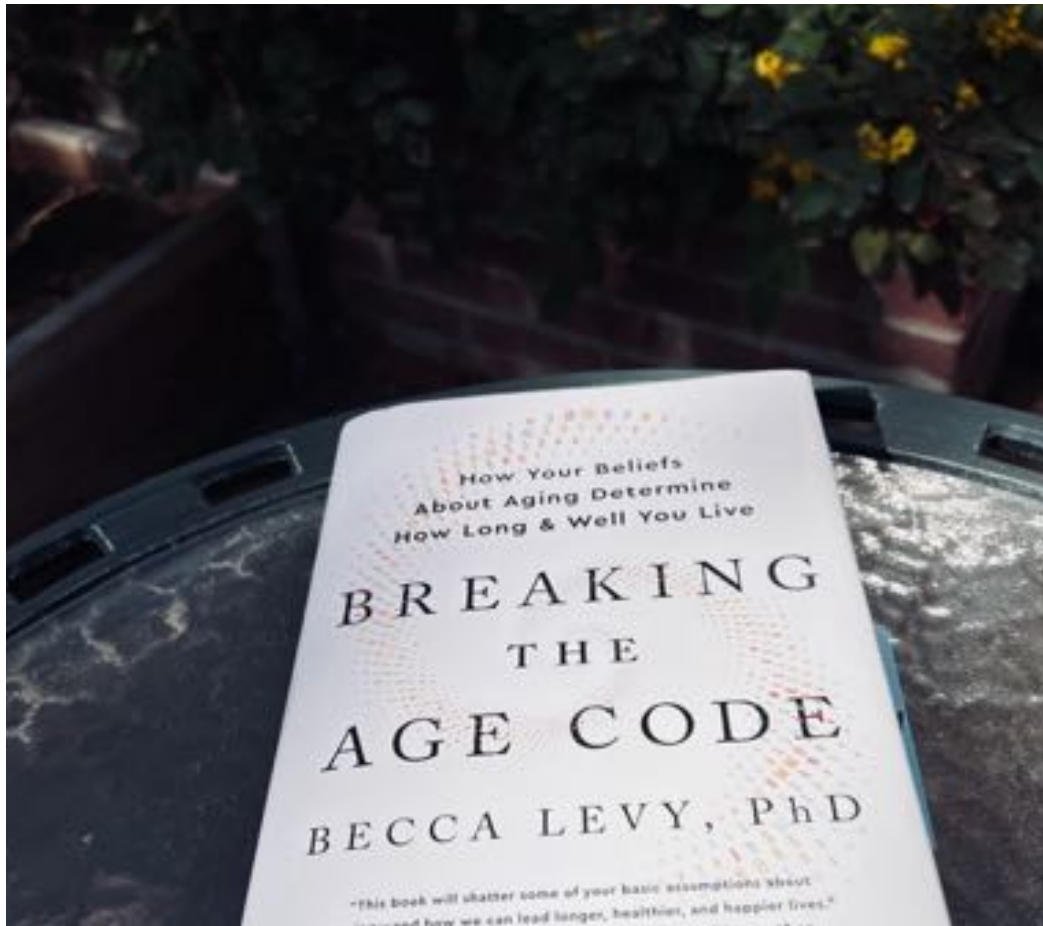
- **Increased longevity (7.5 years)**

- **Improved health**

- **Greater ability to recover**

- **Reduced likelihood of dementia (by almost half)**

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AND—THE WORLD IS CHANGING

From Pyramid to Pillar: A Century of Change. Population of the United States. 1960 and 2060. U.S. Census Bureau. Source: National Population Projections, 2017. www.census.gov/programs-surveys/popproj.html

BUT, POLICIES, SYSTEMS AND FUNDING HAVEN'T KEPT UP

MEDICARE EXCLUSIONS

WORKPLACE AGE DISCRIMINATION

LACK OF CAREGIVER SUPPORT

FRAMEWORKS INSTITUTE GAVE US A PATH

- **Conducted research at the request of leading aging organizations**

- **Mapped messages and language that give us a path forward :**
  - Improved attitudes about aging
  - Decreased implicit bias against older people
  - Increased understanding of need, and support for, policy solutions

SOMETIMES STORIES WE THINK ARE HELPFUL, AREN'T

"Super senior" stories

Demographic crisis: Silver tsunami

The other "ism" | comparing to civil rights

WEAK, VULNERABLE ELDERLY

Compassionate ageism

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SO WHAT STORIES CHANGE MINDS?

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PRINCIPLE 1: MOVE AWAY FROM INDIVIDUAL "EPISODIC" STORIES

- A group of women in their 60s stuffing sacks with workshop refreshment leftovers

- Isaac talking about his grandma being sad after losing her job

- Betty being evicted

- A caretaker who couldn't stay in the workforce when things shut down

- Poor older person without technology

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INSTEAD, "WIDEN THE LENS" ON OUR STORIES TO PROVIDE A SYSTEMS VIEW

- **The women and grandma— workplace age discrimination and need for retraining/upskilling**

- **Betty's eviction—a lack of affordable housing options for people of *all ages***

- **Caretakers—need for caretaking infrastructure**

- **Digital divide—in many communities**

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PRINCIPLE 2: TALK ABOUT CONCRETE, COLLECTIVE SOLUTIONS

REMOVE GRADUATION DATES FROM JOB APPLICATIONS

NOT, DYEING HAIR & SHAVING YEARS OFF RESUME

PRINCIPLE 3. USE TESTED STORIES

Increases understanding, shifts opinions, generates support for solutions

1. Values
Why does this matter?

Use *tested* values

2. Explain
Use metaphors, and share examples

—How does this work?

—If it doesn't work, why not?

3. Solutions
What can we do about the problem we are raising?

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STORY 1: "EMBRACING THE DYNAMIC"

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE | OLDER ADULTS AS RESOURCES

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LEADS WITH VALUE OF INGENUITY AND INNOVATION

We are problem-solvers.

When we see an opportunity, we figure out how to seize it. When we see that something isn't working, we rethink our approach.

Replacing outdated practices with new, smarter ways of doing things is the key to our nation's ingenuity.

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EXPLAINS AGING USING THE METAPHOR OF BUILDING MOMENTUM

Getting older is a dynamic process that involves constant and continuous change.

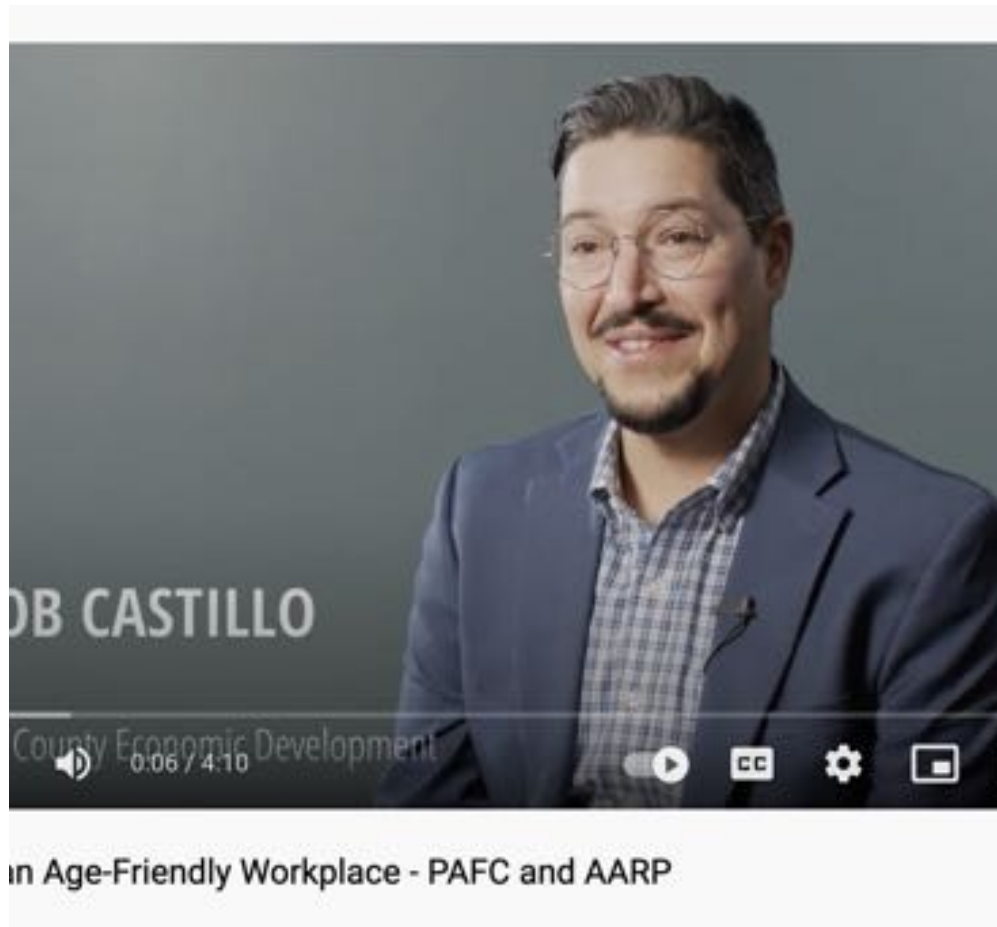As we age, we gather momentum through the build-up of experiences and insights.

This momentum can add power and force to moving our workforce and communities forward—and so, we should do all we can to support it and make the most of it.

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OFFERS CONCRETE SOLUTIONS

Step 3. Offer a concrete solution, e.g. intergenerational, reciprocal mentoring

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EXAMPLE. VALUE, EXPLANATION, SOLUTION
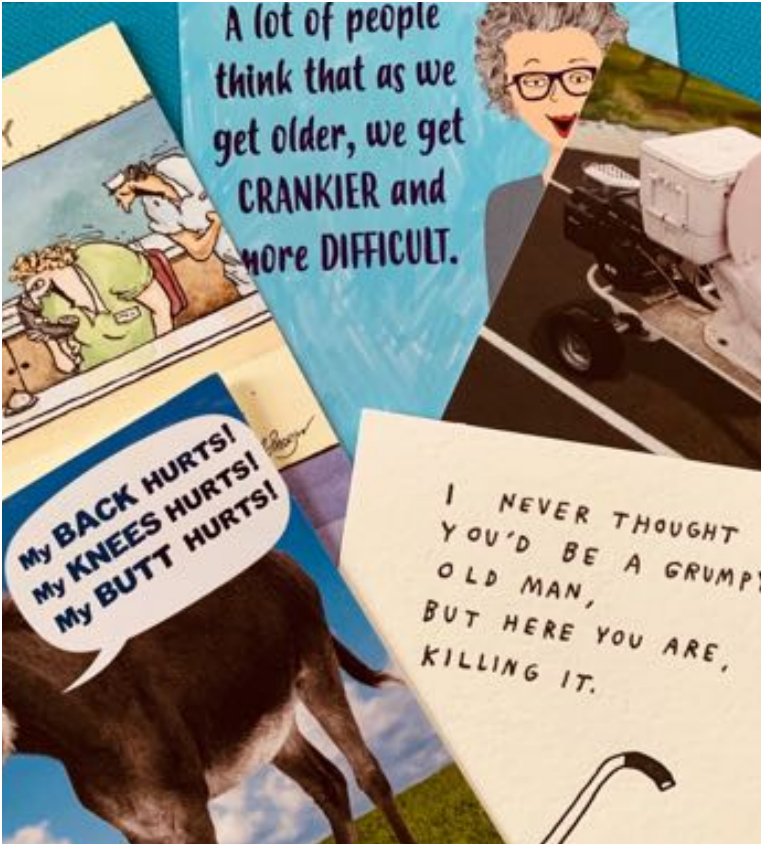

Age-Friendly Workplace - PAFC and AARP

- **ADVANCE**

  Value: We need to apply our spirit of ingenuity to address the hiring challenges our local businesses are facing.

  Building momentum metaphor: Older workers have insight, experience, strong communications skills and connections we have built up over time.

  Solution: Employers can bring on older workers to help address their talent shortages and "profit from experience."

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STORY 2. "CONFRONTING INJUSTICE"

A WAY TO TALK ABOUT AGEISM

LEADS WITH THE VALUE OF JUSTICE

Justice requires recognizing all members of society are equal.

Right now our society is not treating older people as equals—we are marginalizing participation and minimizing contributions of all of us as we age.

To live up to our ideals, we must confront the injustice of ageism and work to reshape our society so that all of us are fully included in our communities as we age.

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EXPLAINS AGEISM AND ITS EFFECTS

Tom Steckel, 62, on the plains outside Pierre, South Dakota, where he's the state's employee benefits director. He's happy for the work after being laid off three times since turning 50, but it's a long way from home. (Ackerman + Gruber, special to ProPublica)

AGE DISCRIMINATION

If You're Over 50, Chances Are the Decision to Leave a Job Won't be Yours

- Ageism is prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination based on age.

- When directed at older people, it often involves assumptions that older people are less competent, capable, attractive.

- Ageism has tremendously negative impacts on older people, affecting every aspect of our lives as we age, and also has negative effects on community and society.

- Use *WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION* as an example.

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ALSO EXPLAINS IMPLICIT BIAS

Because of the messages our brains receive from childhood on, we subconsciously form negative judgments about people based on their age, but just being aware of these biases makes us less likely to act on them and more likely to treat people fairly.

PROVIDES CONCRETE, SYSTEMIC SOLUTIONS, E.G.

- Eliminate graduation dates from applications

- Train managers on implicit bias

- Advocate to include age in DEI policies

- Establish better systems for hiring

- Educate employers on the business case for older workers

- Ensure stimulus dollars are used to upskill, reskill and nextskill older workers

- Strengthen age discrimination laws

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INSTEAD OF...

With social distancing in place, vulnerable seniors without technology are isolated and can't access health care.

TRY THIS...

Value: In our community, we believe everyone should have access to opportunity.

Explanation: Because of digital divides, some people have a harder time than others accessing health care, K-12 education and being able to work remotely.

Solution: We can help to close the digital divide by ensuring all our communities have access to broadband, and those who need it have access to technology and training.

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WORDS AND VISUALS MATTER

TALKING ABOUT DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

AVOID	INSTEAD USE
Silver tsunami, grey wave, going off the demographic cliff	👈 People are living longer and mostly healthier lives Birth rates are declining
Finite resources | zero sum	👈 Let's use our ingenuity | re-envision what's possible | create new policies and programs to address a changing world

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OLDER ADULTS AND AGING

AVOID		INSTEAD USE
Elderly, senior, senior citizen	👉	Use older adults | persons, or descriptive language
They and them	👉	Us and we
"Battling" aging, anti-aging	👉	Acknowledge that aging is a normal, dynamic process
Choice, better planning, control	👉	Improve social context | creative solutions

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INSTEAD OF...

USE

QUESTIONS?

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IDEAS TO ACTION

What is one concrete step you will take in the next 30 days to change the stories that you tell?

LET'S CONNECT!

🌐 **bit.ly/EndAgeismTogether**

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🌐 **changingthenarrativeco.org/**

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f **ChangeNarrativeUS**

in **changing-the-narrative-co**