

# REFRAMING AGING SAN FRANCISCO

## CHANGING HOW WE TALK ABOUT AGING AND AGEISM

### GOALS

#### **Recognize that older adults are a diverse group.**

Older adults have a wide range of strengths, skills, interests, and needs. Our cities, workplaces, and communities lose out when we marginalize part of our population.

#### **Provide community support.**

Enable older adults to remain engaged and active. Reducing isolation and increasing opportunities to have a sense of purpose has measurable health impacts.

#### **Develop policies and resources.**

Enable our society to respond to challenges and benefits of people living longer. Many of these policies benefit people of all ages — better public transportation options, supporting caregivers, flexible work schedules, job sharing, and many more.

### CHANGE THE LANGUAGE

Research by the Frameworks Institute shows we can make our points more effectively if we change our language to avoid “the swamp” of people’s preconceived notions about aging and older adults. Internalized ageism starts as early as preschool, and our culture strengthens these negative attitudes throughout our lives.

- **Say older people or older adults.** In a research study, participants viewed older adults and older people as more capable than seniors, senior citizens, and elders.
- **Avoid “othering” older adults.** We are all aging. Viewing older adults as other reduces the public’s sense that we all need to create change. Try replacing “they” and “them” with “we” and “us.”
- **Frame aging as a community and systemic issue rather than an individual one.** Be careful with stories about “super seniors” or “living proof” profiles. These can overlook the important societal and environmental factors that affect our health and longevity. Such stories can reinforce the public’s default belief that aging outcomes are primarily a matter of individual decisions.
- **Beware the ableism trap.** Stories of “successful aging” also contribute to public perception that aging and disability are things to be fixed, cured, or overcome. This view ignores the rich, varied lives of people of all abilities. And it places the focus again on individuals rather than eliminating systemic barriers that prevent people of all ages and abilities from fully engaging in our communities.
- **Avoid implying impending disaster.** Use *silver reservoir* or *longevity dividend* rather than *silver tsunami* or other imagery that implies impending disaster. Stories that describe a looming crisis leave many feeling powerless and disengaged. Changing how we talk about generational shifts allows the public to see the whole picture and be open to innovative solutions.

### DESCRIBE AGEISM

Much of the public is not entirely sure what ageism is, or views it as discrimination by a small percentage of individuals. Be sure to define ageism, give concrete example(s) relevant to your topic, and show that there’s

a place to intervene. Frameworks found that Including an explanation of implicit bias — that ageism is deeply ingrained in most of us since childhood - allowed research participants to see ageism as a serious problem.

*Ageism is prejudice or discrimination based on assumptions about age. Ageism against older people reduces our well-being, and even our lifespans. When we rely on negative stereotypes about older people, we miss out on the joy, creativity, intelligence, and many other strengths that older people contribute to our workplaces and communities. — Reframing Aging San Francisco*

## CHANGE THE FRAME

Framing our conversations differently can help people move beyond their default beliefs about growing older. Based on their research, the Frameworks Institute found justice, ingenuity, and momentum themes the most effective ways to improve the public’s age-related knowledge, attitudes, and policy preferences. The following examples adapt these messages for San Francisco

- **Justice:** San Francisco stands for innovation, inclusion and diversity. We can and must do more to enable people at all stages of life to find growth, connection and joy. Right now, our society is not treating older people as equals — in fact, we are marginalizing their participation and minimizing their contributions. To live up to San Francisco’s potential, we must confront the injustice of ageism.

*Note: To expand on the Justice frame, DO explain systemic causes of and solutions to ageism.*

*DON'T: Position ageism as another “-ism” or a civil rights issue. This was found to be ineffective.*

- **Ingenuity:** San Francisco has a long history of innovation. When we see an opportunity, we figure out how to seize it — and when we see something that isn’t working, we rethink our approach. We must continue working together — City agencies, nonprofits, academics, and businesses — to create innovative programs and policies that enable older adults and people with disabilities to remain engaged and active members of our community.
- **Momentum:** We all seek opportunities to apply our strengths, find solutions, and contribute to the City we love. Older adults’ lifetime of experience and perspective can play a vital role in moving San Francisco forward. Unfortunately, we’re losing out on this incredible dynamism. Providing services and supports that enable older people to stay connected and engaged opens up our community to this vital source of power and possibility.

## FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS

Be sure to include examples of successful programs and specific solutions. Without examples, research participants focused on small, individual actions or expressed a sense of fatalism. Frameworks found that focusing on ingenuity and innovative solutions disrupts the public’s complacency and fatalism. Discussing the need for new solutions “jolts people into thinking bigger.”

## KEEP LEARNING

Find out more about reframing aging at [frameworksinstitute.org/reframing-aging.html](https://frameworksinstitute.org/reframing-aging.html). They have a large number of helpful materials, including research, guides, and reframing examples.

For more resources on aging and ageism, see the links at [EndAgeism.com](https://EndAgeism.com).