Sequence Matters – Remember the Framing Formula

Use the *4 core elements* of an effective frame, in the right order (as sequence does matter) to:

1	**Tested Value**	*Prime the listener*

+

2	**Tested Metaphor**	*Show not tell how it works*

+

3	**Illustration**	*Make it come alive in the real world*

+

4	**Policy Solution**	*Offer practical solution(s) within reach*
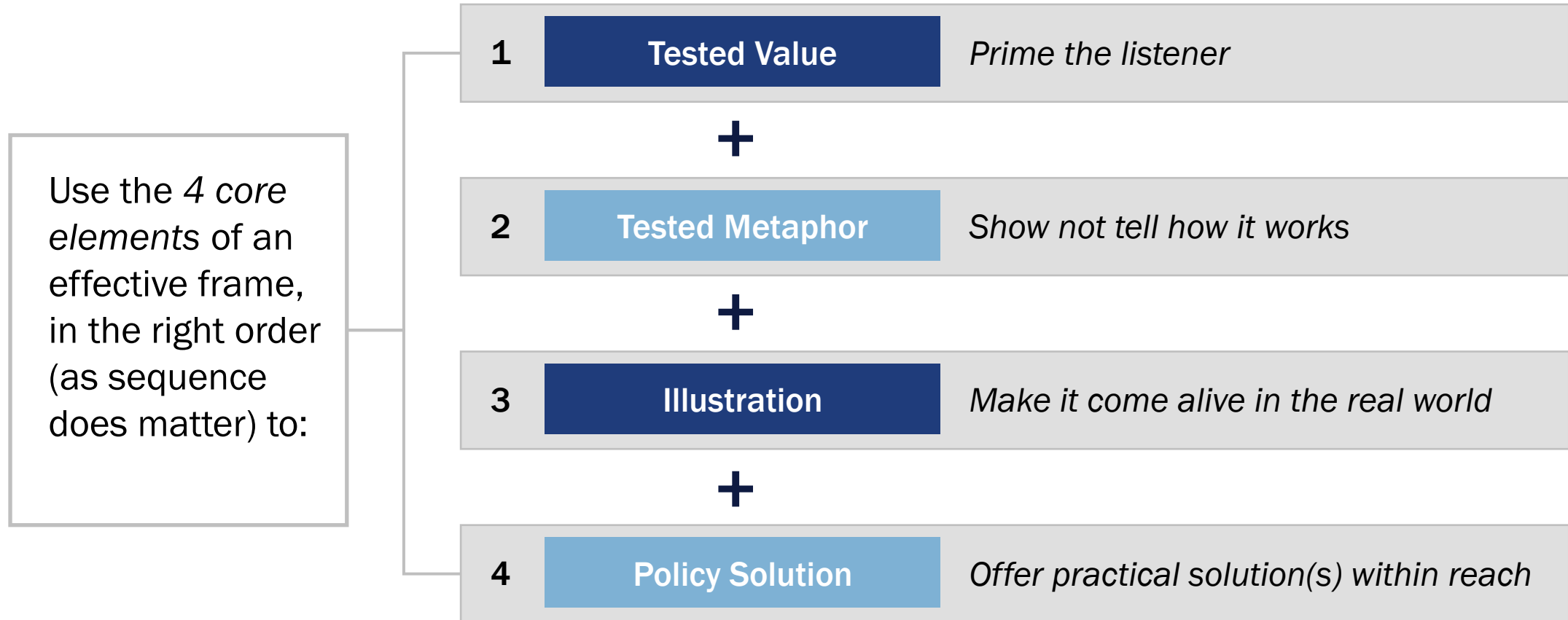
Framing Formula

STEP 1

Start with a VALUE that is widely shared—something most Americans believe in—that the reader/listener can nod their head to

Tested Value	+	Tested Metaphor	+	Illustration	+	Policy Solution

WHY?   This approach 'primes' the reader to be open to what's next
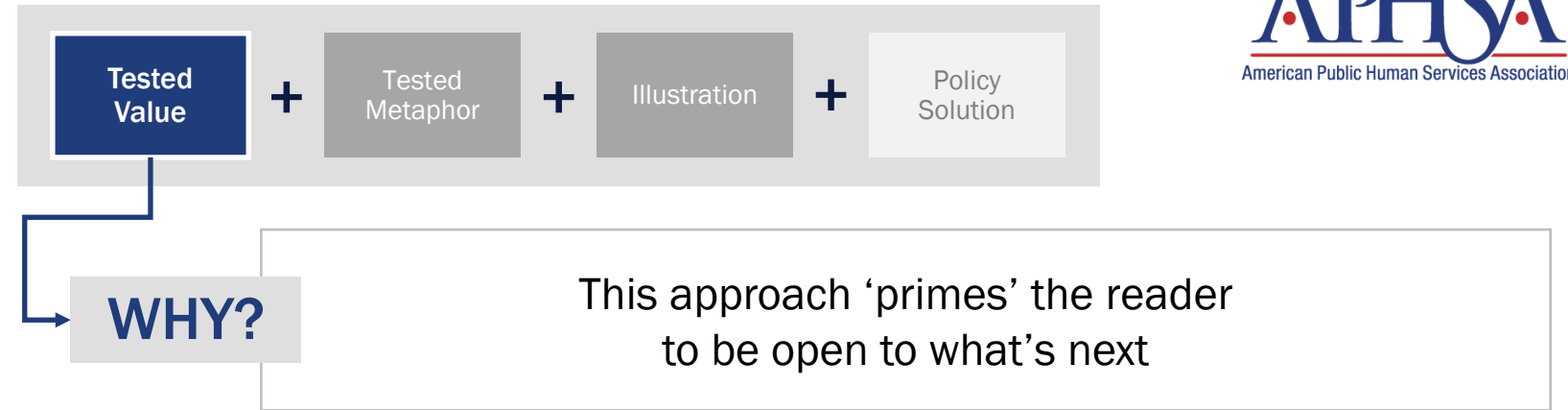
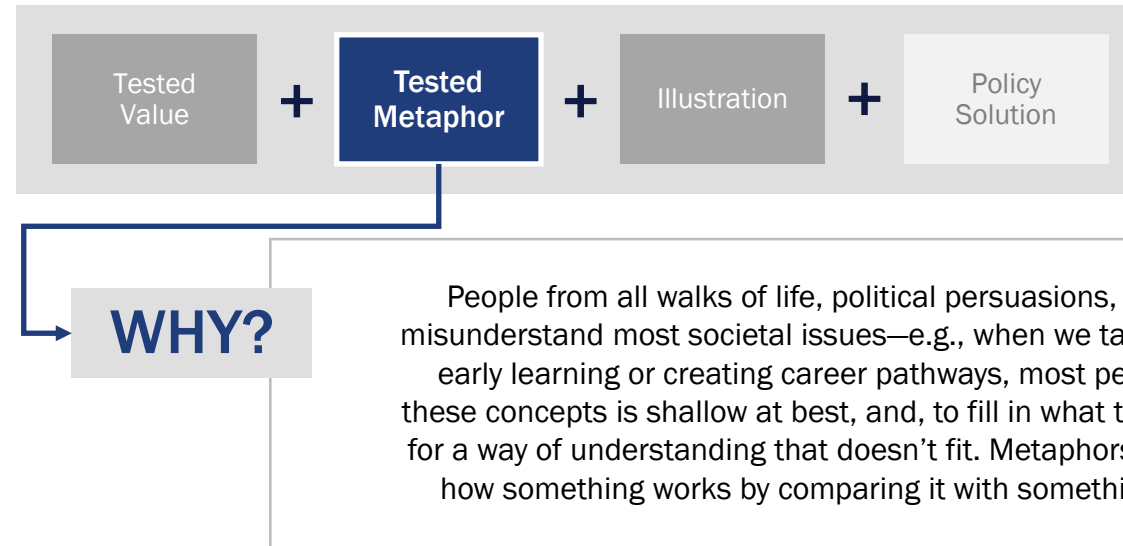Example of a _value_ that works well for our work:

VALUES WE AIM TO TRIGGER

- Every person is born with the potential to build and live a good life *(human potential)*
- Every American should have a chance to reach their full potential no matter where they're born *(fairness across place)*

- There are common sense solutions that we know work *(pragmatism)*
- It make sense to prevent problems from getting worse and costing more by acting early on *(prevention)*

Framing Formula

Make the issue you're writing about understandable by using an EXPLANATORY METAPHOR to show how the issue works

THIS IS SHOW+TELL BILLY, NOT TELL+TELL!

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Tested Value	+	Tested Metaphor	+	Illustration	+	Policy Solution

WHY? People from all walks of life, political persuasions, and levels of education misunderstand most societal issues—e.g., when we talk about the importance of early learning or creating career pathways, most people's understanding of these concepts is shallow at best, and, to fill in what they don't know, they reach for a way of understanding that doesn't fit. Metaphors help prime people to see how something works by comparing it with something they DO understand.

Example of a _metaphor_ that works well for our work:

CONSTRUCTION

The opportunity for all to live well and thrive is constructed—thriving doesn't just happen but results from living in a community built to enable everyone to live up to their full potential.
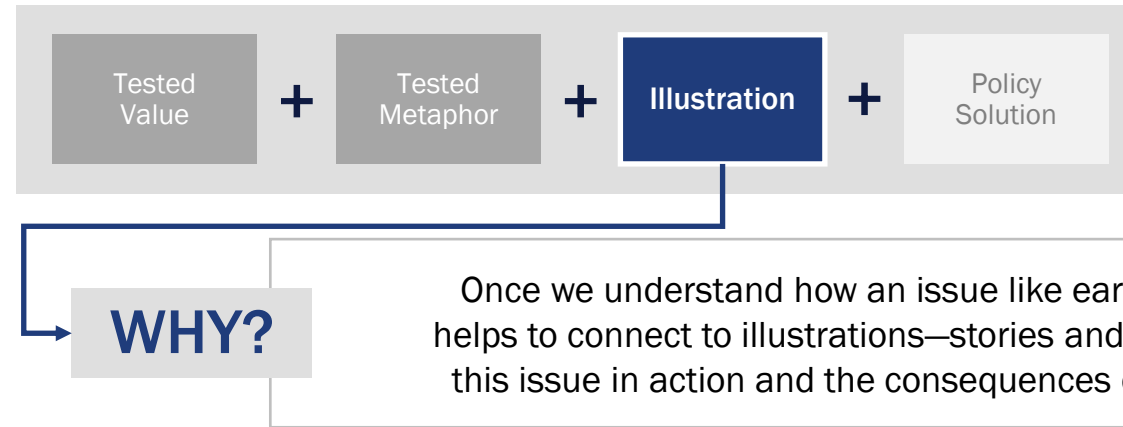
Tips for applying the metaphor:
- Use a light touch in applying the metaphor. If we go too far with extending it, we lose the point of what the metaphor explains.
- Signal that you're using a metaphor by starting with, "like a..." or "just as..." or "similar to..."

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Framing Formula

STEP 3

Now that you've shown how an issue works, it's time to illustrate the issue as it shows up in the real world

| Tested Value | + | Tested Metaphor | + | **Illustration** | + | Policy Solution |

WHY?   Once we understand how an issue like early learning works, it helps to connect to illustrations—stories and numbers—that show this issue in action and the consequences of not addressing it.

STORIES illustrate what the topic is and why it matters. They tie the concept to real, relatable people and examples.

Tips for applying stories:

- Stories should ideally cover the lifespan— early learning isn't just about infants and young kids—stories are also about parents, about older children who feel the consequences of lack of early learning, about adults who do better because of their experience of quality early learning, etc. Life cycle examples make the stories more relatable to more readers.

DATA illustrates the problem and solutions. Stories are more believable when understanding why the data matters in the first place.
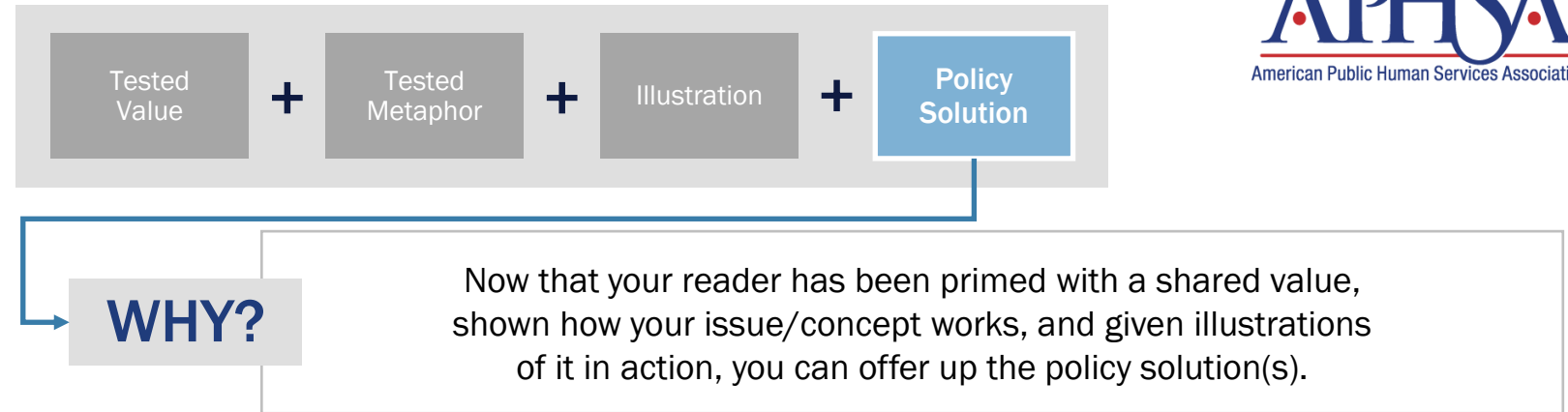
Tips for applying data:

- Avoid relying on data that shows how badly the U.S. is doing—this tends to backfire (people don't believe it).
- Make sure your comparisons are reasonable and relevant.
- Compare like things—e.g., how much we spend on childcare vs. how much we spend on highways isn't a useful comparison.

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Framing Formula

STEP 4

Offer a policy solution that feels practical, achievable, and represents a wise investment

Tested Value	+	Tested Metaphor	+	Illustration	+	Policy Solution

WHY? Now that your reader has been primed with a shared value, shown how your issue/concept works, and given illustrations of it in action, you can offer up the policy solution(s).

Tips for solutions:

- It's most effective to present policy solutions as very achievable (vs. lofty) through practical real-world approaches. Words like, "common sense," and "step by step" are often helpful.

- To overcome fatalism and disbelief (too big to fix), worlds like "innovative" can work well, as can "ingenuity." The combination of innovative and practical/real world is powerful in cueing a sense of hope and building support.

Rules of Thumb to Keep at the Forefront

When making word choices, keep these general framing principles in mind

- Focus opening remarks in ways that are aspirational and appeal to all audiences
- Use words/phrases that illustrate our interconnectedness to each other—*lean on words and phrases like "us," "all of us"*
- Avoid words that are crisis-oriented, overly negative, or otherwise invoke fatalistic thinking that a problem is too big to solve
- Tie descriptions of issues and solutions to fixing systems (not people or behaviors). *Think about painting a landscape not a portrait.*
- For solutions to fixing systems to make sense, the *listener/reader must first understand that the issue involves a system and how that system works to produce results we don't want (hence the need for a metaphor)*
- When mentioning specific groups, use people-first descriptions
  - e.g., families with low income (not low-income families); people experiencing homelessness (not homeless people)
- Don't reinvent the wheel: Draw from APHSA publications and tools