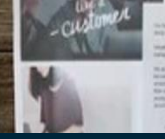




Change Concept??



- Find inspiration wherever you go!
- Rise above the fray
- Start doing right!



STRATEGY

Philanthropy Under Fire How We Respond Matters

Philanthropic leaders today are facing an unprecedented set of challenges—from political pushback on social programs to economic uncertainty and growing disparities in the communities we serve. The work of strengthening communities and making the case for change, has never been more critical, yet it is increasingly under threat. And while we don't always get to choose when or where these challenges arise, we do get to choose how we respond.

Strategic CaseMaking™ is essential. Every moment of crisis or opposition presents a decision point: Do we need to respond? Do we engage directly? Do we shift tactics or investment strategy? Do we build new partnerships and alliances? These choices shape not just our immediate effectiveness as a sector and as organizations, but the long-term sustainability of the work we do.

This framework is designed to help philanthropic leaders navigate these decisions with clarity and confidence. It offers a guide for assessing when to step forward, when to adapt, and how to ensure that our response is both principled and effective. Now, more than ever, how we respond will define the future of philanthropy—and the communities that depend on it.

The Noise That's Designed to Distract Us

TheCaseMade has been working with philanthropic organizations and their community partners to understand how to respond strategically at this moment. We cautioned against the knee-jerk reactionary stuff that first emerged hot off the inauguration and in response to the first signs of trouble. And, of the folks that we work with, most have heeded that advice. As the inflammatory rhetoric gets sharper however and as more philanthropic organizations feel like they have “a target on our backs”, many feel like they will be forced to respond. So, here's some guidance in how to do that strategically. First, name the distractions calling you forward.

In some ways, they are right. We're seeing it all:

- News reports that are calling out specific philanthropic organizations as targets
- Local disruptors stirring the pot
- Online trolls launching an attack
- Threats of funding cuts or reputational damage
- Personal and organizational security threats
- Inflammatory rhetoric targeting members of our communities

At TheCaseMade, we've created an easy-to-follow blueprint, *Strategic CaseMaking™*, to make it easier for you to call people to action in ways that transform our world for the better.





THREE CRITICAL QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU RESPOND

You should ask three critical questions before responding publicly in your capacity as a funder:

- Do we need to respond?
- Are we best positioned to respond?
- How do we avoid the typical backfires and reclaim our power if we must respond?

Step 1: Do We Need to Respond?

Let's clarify why we are responding. Yes, we all want to counter and push back on harmful ideas and misinformation, but this is a moment to be strategic, not reactionary. Remember, a poorly thought-out response can do more harm than good.

- **Safety or harm reduction** – There is an opportunity or need to protect the safety of your community or staff, and your response can help.
- **Shifting the narrative** – There is an opportunity to use your response to change public perception on issues of importance to your organization and/or to support community partners' efforts to do the same.
- **Inspiring and mobilizing stakeholders** – You believe there is an opportunity to encourage people to take action or deepen their engagement as a part of the response.
- **Addressing reputational risk** – You need to respond to false claims or mischaracterizations that could impact your ability to deliver funding or your credibility as you do that.
- **Particularly charismatic, articulate leadership on the issues at hand** – You may have internal leadership in your organization with particular expertise or persuasive voice on the issues at hand, so it's worth it to offer up a thoughtful response.

If you are not responding for one of these reasons, STOP! 🛑. This is not your moment to respond, and you will likely do more harm than good (i.e., it will backfire when you do), while elevating someone else's agenda and commentary. But if you've good reasons to respond (see the list above again!), read on!

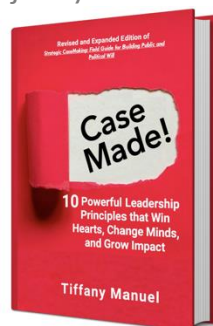
Step 2: Are We the Best Voice?

If you have determined that you need to respond, quickly assess whether the response needs to come from you. Sometimes, the most strategic move is to let others speak on your behalf.

Key Considerations:

- Are there allies or coalitions that can respond more effectively?
- Would an external response or a response with a broader coalition of voices show broader solidarity?
- Is the attack explicitly targeted at your organization, or is this part of a larger pattern of disruption?

If you're under attack, sometimes it's best to let stronger allies or unaffected partners step in. This reinforces the strength of your coalition. And if this is a pattern of disruption for many (not just your organization), you need a coordinated response, not a singular one.





Three Critical Questions to Ask BEFORE You Respond

Step 3: How Do We Respond?

So now, you've determined that you need to respond and you are best positioned to respond, the question is HOW. How you respond depends on what you need to accomplish and how deeply involved you are called to be. Here's a calculus to use as you do.

Level 1: Pivot

REDIRECT THE CONVERSATION TO INSPIRE BYSTANDERS AND FEED CONSTRUCTIVE ENERGY INTO THE PUBLIC CONVERSATION

The goal is to *move negative disruptors out of the way* while pulling bystanders off the sidelines and *interjecting more constructive energy into the public conversations* about the issue. The pivot is never meant to actually persuade your opposition of your viewpoint – if they're attacking you for some reason, they aren't usually open to being persuaded. But the way you respond, if done well, could get the folks riding the sidelines to stand with you and join the work you're trying to do. Detail on the steps to a pivot are in the book, Case Made, where we devote almost an entire chapter to providing the steps, guidelines, and examples of how to do it effectively. It is the best flex ever when you practice how to do this and you do it well! It helps you reclaim your power (individually and organizationally), rewires the conversation toward something positive, and helps you lift up the issues that are the heartbeat of your organization.

Level 2: Pivot + Seed A New Narrative

REDIRECT THE CONVERSATION THROUGH A PIVOT AND SEED A NEW NARRATIVE OR AMPLIFY AN EXISTING ONE THAT COUNTERS THE DOMINANT NARRATIVE

Take the pivot further by *seeding an alternative narrative on the issue* that not only pivots around the negative disruptors but also shifts the dominant narrative and puts something better in its place. This is a real flex—using attacks not just as moments to navigate around misinformation or negative disruptors but as opportunities to elevate and amplify new, more powerful narratives for the future. This works best when you've done some narrative analysis to understand why those dominant narratives keep showing up in your space and what alternative narratives can be amplified to move the public consciousness in a different direction. At TheCaseMade, we call this “unseating a dominant narrative and seating a new one.” This strategy is particularly effective if you are seeding the new narrative as part of a bigger coalition to benefit from the repetition of true narrative change, which needs to be effective. In other words, you want the new narrative to be heard all across your community by various groups, organizations, agencies, and residents. The more people you can get repeating it, the more likely you are to unseat the dominant narratives you've been handed.

Level 3: Pivot + Seed + CaseMaking

USE THE RESPONSE TO HELP MAKE THE CASE FOR SOLUTIONS YOU WANT TO ELEVATE

This is the strongest form of response and the biggest flex—one that not only pivots around inflammatory rhetoric and seeds a new narrative but uses that new narrative to elevate a new, more powerful vision for the future. In other words, use the response to actually make a case for the solutions you've wanted to elevate and prioritize anyway. The book on casemaking and the 10 core principles will help underscore how to make an affirmative case for those solutions. Read every word, every chapter and follow the advice!

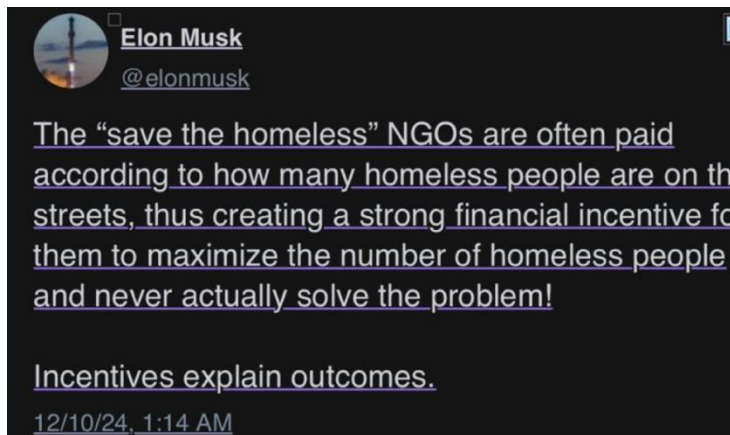




A CaseMaking Example On the Framework: Homelessness

This is just one example of what a response could look like at all three levels of engagement

WHAT POISONED THE PUBLIC CONVERSATION



LEVEL 1 RESPONSE – THE PIVOT

We love that so many people are talking about the need to address homelessness! It’s the holiday season and it is cold outside in many places – so the timing is perfect to get our unhoused neighbors housed!

And here’s the good news...homelessness is solvable and as we get more people across our region involved in our work, we’re solving this problem together. All we need now, is you! Would you do us the honor of helping us house more of our neighbors?



Note: Credit belongs to Community Solutions for the three infographics above.





A CaseMaking Example On the Framework: Homelessness

The New Narrative: We See You and We're Bringing Resources to Support You.

Context: Research tells us that unhoused people often feel unseen. The interesting thing about that is, if you ask ordinary Americans about how they feel in this moment (especially relative to their housing needs), they will also say that they feel unseen by policymakers who do not seem interested in solving their housing challenges. So, our ability to build a bigger narrative around what it looks like to be seen allows us to honor what we've heard our unhoused neighbors say and at the same time, connect it powerfully to the fates of many others in our communities who also feel unseen. Our ability to build a narrative of shared fates here is important and pivotal, especially at this moment.

LEVEL 2 RESPONSE – THE PIVOT + SEED A NEW NARRATIVE

We love that so many people are talking about the need to address homelessness! It's the holiday season and it is cold outside in many places – so the timing is perfect to get our unhoused neighbors housed!

Here's what we know...homelessness is solvable, and we need more resources it is but we know how to do it (*hint:* it's making safe, affordable housing more abundant, not just for those who are unhoused but for the millions of Americans whose housing isn't what they need).

- To the **seniors**, looking to downsize and want to stay in their communities but can't find something suitable...we see you!
- To the **college grads**, coming back home to the towns where you grew up, but can't afford a decent apartment, we see you!
- To the **families looking for that starter home** but can't find anything remotely affordable or near good schools, we see you!
- To our **unhoused neighbors** who need both housing and services to stay stably housed, we see you!

We see you and we're working hard everyday to make safe, affordable housing more abundant for everyone who needs it, no matter what brought you to our doors!

And we do this work, not out of a sense of charity but because that's what good neighbors do for their neighbors!

Some folks may have forgotten what it's means to be a good neighbor, but we have not.

We see you and we're bringing more neighbors to help!



WE SEE YOU





A CaseMaking Example On the Framework: Homelessness

The New Narrative: We See You and We’re Bringing Resources to Support You.

Making the Case for: A community foundation initiative that will support youth aging out of foster care and avoid homelessness.

Context: Here we wrap the new narrative around a specific ask that this community foundation was already planning to launch. Your foundation may be launching something else, but the idea is still the same – pivot, seed the new narrative, and then, wrap that narrative around the programs, investments, or services that are priorities for your team.

LEVEL 3 RESPONSE – THE PIVOT + SEED + CASEMAKING

Announcing The Brilliant Futures Fund: Investing in Youth, Building Our Future

To all of the amazing people in Portland helping us to address unhoused youth, we see you and we’re bringing the resources you need to do that work even better. Announcing the Brilliant Futures Fund, an initiative of the Portland Community Foundation meant to ensure that every young person in our region has the support, stability, and opportunity to thrive—no exceptions. The future of our community depends on how we invest in all of our youth, including those who have historically been overlooked.

A key focus of this fund is supporting youth aging out of foster care, a group we have under-invested in for too long. Without stable housing, education, and career pathways, too many of these talented young people struggle to find their footing. Yet we know that when we invest in them, we aren’t just changing individual lives—we are strengthening the next generation of leaders, entrepreneurs, artists, and changemakers.

The Brilliant Futures Fund will provide:

- ✔ Stable housing and transitional support for youth exiting foster care.
- ✔ Career training, mentorship, and scholarships to help them build thriving futures.
- ✔ Entrepreneurship and creative grants to nurture their talents and big ideas.
- ✔ Mental health and life skills programs to ensure long-term success.

We don’t want to miss out on the next Steve Jobs, Oprah Winfrey, Maya Angelou, Tyler Perry, Howard Schultz, or Viola Davis—all of whom once faced housing insecurity in their youth. With the right support, they built legacies that shaped the world.

By investing in this fund we are saying to an entire new generation of leaders – we see you, we want you succeed, and we’re bring the support system that you need to thrive.



WE SEE YOU



Framework for Strategically Responding to Negative Disruptors

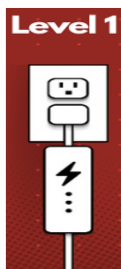
Pivot, Seed, CaseMake

Level 3: Pivot + Seed + CaseMaking

Use the response to help you make the case for a solutions you've already wanted to elevate.

Level 1: Pivot

Redirect the conversation to inspire bystanders and feed constructive energy into the public conversation.



Level 2: Pivot + Seed

Redirect the conversation and seed a new narrative or amplify an existing one that shifts the dominant narrative.



Level 3



RESPONDING STRATEGICALLY RECLAIMS OUR POWER

We may not get to choose the battleground, but we always get to decide how we fight. This moment—this crisis—is not just a challenge. It's an opportunity. We cannot afford to waste it.

In times of uncertainty and attack, our power lies in how we respond—not just reacting, but leading with strategy, clarity, and purpose. When misinformation spreads, when opposition targets our work, and when rhetoric turns hostile, the real flex is using these moments to advance our mission, fortify our coalitions, and redefine the narrative on our terms.

We are living through one of the most consequential challenges to democracy and justice in our time. But let's not forget this didn't happen overnight, and it won't be undone with knee-jerk reactions. If we chase every attack, we'll lose sight of what truly matters—the work of building something stronger, more just, and more enduring.

Instead of reacting, we must be strategic. Power is knowing when to engage, when to pivot, and when to double down on building the future we envision. Every crisis holds an opportunity—not just to defend what exists, but to reshape what comes next.

Here's to the leaders who know that real power isn't just in resistance—it's in strategy, vision, and action. Those who see the bigger picture and move with courage, clarity, and purpose.

Let's use it wisely.





Calling All Justice-Seekers!

You're working hard to reimagine and redesign the unjust systems that are standing in the way of the prosperous future we all want.

Unfortunately, the ways we learned to build public support for those changes often backfire – sapping our energy and leaving us further from our goals.

We can learn to persuade differently. Using skills and strategies informed by social science that convince others to join – and stay – with us on our journey to justice.

We call it Strategic CaseMaking. And we'd love to teach you!



Work with Us!

Strategic CaseMaking™ 10 Core Principles to Make a Strong Case for Your Work

Tell People What They Lose if They Sit on the Sidelines
Loss Aversion

Name the Power of the Moment to Shape the Future
Urgency & Agency

Connect to People's Aspirations & Build a Strong "We" Around It
Stake

Navigate the Dominant Narratives
Mental Models

Anchor & Credential the Solutions, Not Problems
Awareness & Agency

Tell the Story of US
Leveraging the Power of Storytelling

Foster Collective Ownership
Power Shifting

Make Inequitable Systems the Villain
Systems Orientation

Clarify Your Value Proposition
Trust

Share Your Roadmap and Metrics for Success
Trust & Clarity of Purpose