



Breaking the Cycle of Dismissiveness

Effective Framing of a Race-Forward Policy Agenda

By the Topos Partnership

For Kansas Action for Children

September 2019

INTRODUCTION & SUMMARY

Kansas Action for Children (KAC) is taking on the difficult and important work of advancing an explicitly race-forward policy agenda in the state. KAC recognizes that pursuing policies to benefit all Kansans, while also addressing the specific challenges faced by historically marginalized communities – particularly Black and Latinx residents – will pay dividends for the entire state.

The end result of the work reported on here is a strategy that not only builds support for KAC's race-forward policy agenda, but also provides a much-needed opening for a deeper, more constructive conversation about race with audiences who are currently resistant to this topic.

Very specific goal

Making progress on KAC's expansive agenda will require broad-based public support. In a state like Kansas, which is 85% White, that means support has to extend beyond voters of color, to include a majority of White voters. This particular project therefore takes on a narrow, but critical question:

How do we build broad-based support among White Kansans for a policy agenda that is explicitly about creating better outcomes for people of color?

The challenge is obviously daunting. Regardless of their political leanings, many Whites can be expected to be unenthusiastic, or even oppositional to such an agenda.

The project is also very specific in its goals. It focuses on developing a deep understanding of why White people, including many White progressives, are not only not on board with a race-forward agenda, they are consistently resistant to being drawn into the kind of conversation that KAC would like to create¹. Most importantly, this project focuses on identifying the most effective strategy for creating openings that allow these conversations to unfold among the public in constructive ways, thus building more understanding and support for KAC's agenda among a crucial, but hard to reach audience.

This is not to say that we stop employing other important strategies to combat racism in other contexts and among other audiences. Calling out racists, affirming the historical depth of the problem, and explaining topics like Structural Racism and White Privilege may well remain necessary strategic starting points for KAC as it undertakes its complex and long-term agenda.

Recommended approach

The exciting finding from the project is that communicators can go a long way towards engaging new audiences by following a particular strategy. Specifically, by aligning race with other challenges people face – then fleshing this story out with specific, eye-opening examples and solutions – communicators can expect to initiate a constructive conversation with a broad cross-section of individuals in the state. This approach opens audiences up to the broader linkages and understandings they tend to dismiss when it comes to race. The basic conceptual idea is:

Many groups of people face specific, concrete, and eye-opening challenges – including, specifically, people of color. But there are effective ways we (the state) can and should address these challenges.

This approach inoculates against resentment because it doesn't single out race as the *only* meaningful factor in determining people's life chances. Instead it invites broad audiences to consider a variety of factors – class, age, disability, isolation, geography – that create challenges worthy of our attention. While such examples are not necessarily comparable in their depth or complexity to race-related challenges, they helpfully illustrate the idea that people in various population categories can face concrete, meaningful obstacles. Once aligned with factors they know something about and can relate to, White Kansans no longer dismiss the topic. Instead, they listen.

When we follow this opening with specific, concrete and eye-opening examples of patently unreasonable *obstacles* that people of color may face – and practical,

¹ Note that the research for the project did include participants of color, but that the emphasis was on identifying approaches that could engage a more challenging audience of White Kansans.

easy-to-understand solutions to empower action – audiences see and embrace a clear, workable path forward.

The following is one way these ideas can be brought together in a coherent and compelling narrative. Communicators can substitute their own examples and emphases. (While analogies to other challenges do not convey the depth or complexity of race-related ones, highlighting them is nonetheless a powerful way of inviting new audiences into the conversation.)

A “segment challenge” is what experts call a hardship faced by a particular group—one that other people may find hard to relate to. People can usually get by despite the challenges their group faces – elderly, disabled, isolated, fired from a job, etc. – but there are also things the state can do to make it easier. For instance, senior citizens often face bankruptcy due to serious, unexpected medical expenses – so we can do more to see that they have access to affordable care. New mothers are at significant risk of isolation and depression that threatens their babies’ health, so we can invest in visitation and support groups. And studies show that many EMTs wrongly believe that Black people have thicker skin or higher pain tolerances than Whites, so they don’t give them the same care – but trainings eliminate these misperceptions so that everyone gets good treatment.

This approach creates the receptive space for a constructive conversation to build support for race-forward policies, opening the door for richer learning and receptiveness as audiences begin to break free of the vicious circle of race dismissiveness.

Self-reinforcing “race dismissiveness”

To understand the power of the recommended approach, it is helpful to consider the landscape we are navigating. For purposes of this project, the heart of the challenge is not about Kansans with explicitly racist views, though those certainly exist. These individuals are unlikely to be moved by any strategy.

Instead it is about *a stubborn and self-reinforcing mindset we call “race dismissiveness”* – a lack of acknowledgement of the profound ways in which race affects people’s life chances, and of how we can play a collective role in making those chances more equal. Many White Kansans are oblivious to seemingly familiar and uncontroversial facts and dynamics related to racial bias, discrimination and systemic obstacles. And as a result, and because they share Americans’ general preference for personal responsibility, they judge people of color for creating all their own problems, resent being made to feel “guilty” about them or responsible for them, and are suspicious of the motives of

anyone who brings up the topic. In turn, this negativity reinforces their seeming unwillingness to hear, understand or take in basic information.

We call this stubborn dynamic the “vicious circle of race dismissiveness,” and it has important implications for communicators.

- Race-dismissive audiences ignore communications about race.
- They often miss the significance of the topic because they don’t share the premises underlying the communications.
- Approaches that focus on proving the extent of race-based disparities, or on explaining Whites’ responsibility to undo and compensate for systemic racism, actually *backfire* by reinforcing the vicious circle rather than disrupt it.

The recommended approach successfully navigates the challenges of race-dismissiveness and helps break this vicious circle, and opens audiences in ways that are helpful not only for the immediate goals of Kansas Action for Children, but for continued conversations in Kansas and elsewhere. Specifically, this approach leads otherwise resistant audiences to bring discrimination into the conversation themselves, in constructive ways(!).

In addition to discussing this approach in greater detail, the full report also examines the shortcomings of a number of less successful approaches.

METHODS

Developed over 15 years of close collaboration between its three principals—a cognitive linguist, a public opinion strategist, and a cultural anthropologist—the Topos approach is designed to deliver communications tools with a proven capacity to shift perspectives in more constructive directions, give communicators a deeper picture of the issue dynamics they are confronting, and suggest the fundamentally different alternatives available to them.

We do this by exploring the cultural and cognitive landscape and rethinking an issue from the ground up—uncovering the hidden patterns of understanding that undermine individual and community engagement while identifying new possibilities and refining a course of action.

Three phases of research

This research was undertaken in ongoing consultation with Kansas Action for Children, and based on three phases of qualitative research: Cognitive Elicitations, Small Groups Conversations, and TalkBack Testing.



Figure 1: Research Phases

The first phase, “Cognitive Elicitations,” (February and March, 2019) entailed 16 in-depth telephone interviews conducted among Kansans. The goal of these semi-structured interviews was to approximate a natural conversation while also encouraging people to reason about the topic of race and race forward policies from a wide variety of perspectives, including some that are unexpected and deliberately challenging. One of the key goals of elicitations is to encourage subjects to think aloud about the issue, rather than reproduce opinions they have stated or may have heard before.

In the second phase (March and April, 2019), a range of message variants were tested through telephone discussions with a diverse group of 38 subjects from around the state, conducted by Topos researchers. Each small group discussion lasted approximately 35 minutes.

This method enables researchers to test the clarity, stickiness and repeatability of key ideas in a setting where they can probe subjects’ responses and gauge how ideas survive or change in the ebb and flow of a group conversation.

The final phase (May and June 2019) entailed two rounds of “TalkBack Testing.” Sixteen short texts were tested to explore various potential ways of framing a race forward policy agenda with responses from over 360 respondents from around the state. In this research, subjects were exposed to various conceptual directions and organizing ideas that were suggested by the earlier elicitations and small group encounters. As people progressed through the online survey, analysts looked to see what parts of these concepts and connections were compelling and memorable to people and which seemed to lead to unhelpful reactions or just fade quickly from their minds as more familiar default patterns of thinking reasserted themselves.

A close reading of all of these data gives us insight into the various models, assumptions, pre-conceptions, frames and so on that people are using to think about the topic at hand.

The overall sample was diverse in terms of age, geography and educational level. 39% of the subjects identified as liberal leaning, 39% conservative and 22% as moderate. 82% of the sample was White and 18% people of color.

More details about each of these methodological phases can be found in the Methodology Appendices attached to this report.

RECOMMENDED APPROACH

The research finds that communicators can navigate the challenges inherent in the topic and successfully engage a broad cross-section of people in constructive dialog.

The recommended core story can be summarized as follows:

Many segments of the population face specific, concrete, and eye-opening challenges that we can—and should—do something about. These segments include, specifically, people of color.

This story can be expressed in many different ways, with different language, examples and emphases.

The rest of this section addresses three key aspects of the story, all of which communicators should keep in mind.

Embed the discussion in the context of challenges that many groups face – i.e. not just challenges based on race.

The most important recommendation coming out of the research is to embed the discussion of race-forward policies in the context of a broader idea, about taking steps to address the special challenges faced by various population segments.

The following is an illustration of one effective way of making the point, but communicators can also express it in other terms.

Sample language:

Experts call parts of the population “segments.” A “segment challenge” is a hardship faced by a particular group—one that other people may find hard to relate to². Some of the people in a particular group—male, female, country or city, lower-income, White, minority³, disabled, etc.—can usually get by despite the particular segment challenges they face, but there are also things the state can do to make things easier⁴. For instance ...

² Initial framing helpfully suggests this is an important new (expert) concept.

³ “Minority” is the term most commonly and naturally used by White Kansans, but communicators can substitute others.

⁴ In this context, the idea of “making things easier” is read as a universal and reasonable goal – to reduce troubling and avoidable challenges where possible.

Emphasizing this broad idea – and treating it as an important new concept – is a framing approach that primes people to respond constructively to the content that comes after for the reasons described below.

Cognitive/conceptual benefit

Aid to understanding: Emphasizing “segments” (by whatever name) *aids understanding* – by providing a clarifying set of analogies, to situations that race-dismissive people may be more familiar with and receptive to. Given that many Whites do not have a grasp of some basic facts/patterns, this is a step towards filling the vacuum.

Social-emotional benefits

More relatable: This framing helps make the situation of people of color *more relatable* for Whites who tend not to think about the topic, and promotes empathy. For example, “I can relate to my rural, disabled grandma, so I get what you mean.” Or, “I guess I never thought about how lack of transportation can keep a disabled person from being able to work.” Or, “I get it; when my brother had twins, he had to go back to work after just a week, and .”

Inoculating against resentment: Importantly, talking in terms of different populations helps *inoculate against feelings of resentment* about a dialog that “always” focuses on race – an important obstacle to reaching race-dismissive audiences. The segment challenges approach does not depend on the premise that race presents *uniquely* profound challenges – a premise that race-dismissive audiences definitely don’t share – and is therefore less off-putting and less likely to trigger the “vicious circle of race dismissiveness” (see next section).

Tapping into sympathy: In fact, this defusing approach can help communicators tap into a commonsense perception even among many Whites that “sure, things probably are tougher for people of color in certain ways.”

It is not society’s responsibility to create equality for all. But society should increase opportunities for segments who are discriminated against. (72-year old conservative White woman, Overland Park)

We need to help one another. We need to get involved with removing challenges for all people. (71-year old conservative White man, Stilwell)

There are people who create challenges without even realizing that it is happening. if we could be a little more aware of what is going on, we could help each other better. (31-year old conservative White woman, Wichita)

Everyone who claims to be a functioning member of society should find this relevant to make us more aware of what really goes on. And as a woman I know that,

*intentional or not, many of us "segment" people without really knowing a person.
(34-year old moderate White woman, Wichita)*

Examples

Communicators can choose their own examples of challenges faced by particular populations not defined by race, but the following are similar to ones that proved helpful in testing.

Senior citizens often face bankruptcy due to serious, unexpected medical expenses – so we can do more to see that they have access to affordable care.

New mothers are at significant risk of isolation and depression that threatens their babies' health, so we can invest in visitation and support groups.

People who live in lower-income, small-town areas may have a tough time getting to work or the doctor, so we might invest in more bus routes.

People in a wheelchair might not always be able to get a friend to help them vote, so we might try to ensure that all polling places can accommodate people in chairs.

While such examples are not necessarily comparable in their depth or complexity to race-related challenges, they helpfully illustrate the idea that people in various population categories can face concrete, meaningful obstacles – including major threats to health and economic well-being – and importantly, that there are ways to alleviate the challenges through public policies and investments.

Offer concrete, eye-opening examples of obstacles specific to people of color

A second important piece of the story involves clarifying some concrete and less familiar obstacles faced by people of color. That is, within the context of “segment challenges” (by whatever name), there are some that are specific to people of color, and particularly Black and Latinx people.

These examples should be about *obstacles rather than outcomes* – conditions people face, or treatment they receive, as opposed to outcomes they achieve, e.g. related to income, wealth, educational attainment or health. As discussed more fully in the next section, *an emphasis on disparities (of outcomes) tends to backfire with broad audiences*, stoking resentment and reinforcing the idea that people of color create their own problems.

Relative *novelty* of examples is also very helpful for opening eyes and triggering new thinking.

Communicators can come up with their own examples, but the following are consistent with ones that were effective in testing.

White doctors tend to spend statistically fewer minutes talking with patients who aren't White.

Innocent Black shoppers are more likely to be falsely accused of stealing.

Fewer Black Kansans inherit houses because past laws and real estate practices prevented their parents from buying them.

White EMTs and medical students often falsely believe that Black patients have thicker skin and higher pain tolerance compared to Whites – so they don't worry about their comfort as much.

A recent study in the Midwest found that a White job applicant with a felony record has better odds of getting a call back than a Black applicant with the same resumé and a clean record.

Importantly, examples should be carefully chosen and vetted, since there are many that may be too familiar to be helpful, or too easy to rationalize. (Profiling: “It makes sense; most terrorists are Muslims.”) (Police shootings: “Just do what the officer tells you and you'll be fine.”) Conservatives themselves cite examples like these as a way to inoculate audiences against openness to new information.

Medical professionals spend less time and attention to their Black patients than White patients. I would expect medical professionals to treat each patient the same regardless of skin color. This is very disturbing to me. (55-year old moderate White woman, Meriden)

Sometimes people are prevented from helping themselves by external forces (60-year old conservative White man, Shawnee)

I am sort of shocked that Black patients are talked to less at doctor visits. Seems like such a small and simple thing, but I'm sure they are hugely impacted by simple things like this all the time and we are too ignorant or busy to catch on and understand. (25-year old conservative White woman, Norton)

“On-ramp” for a fuller conversation

While the goals of this policy-focused effort are very specific, the broader context of racial dynamics in Kansas elsewhere remains an important consideration. For this reason, the researchers were encouraged to see that when approached in the right way, a relatively modest conversation opens the door to topics that audiences are otherwise inclined to resist. As the prior two quotes illustrate, the recommended approach allows

audiences to tap into (suppressed?) recognition of the profound challenges people of color may face, providing a potential on-ramp to a fuller discussion.

Explicitly non-accusatory

An important consideration is that examples should be presented in terms that can't be taken as implicitly accusatory. They should not sound like we're accusing the audience, or even White Kansans in general, of discrimination or prejudice.

In fact, it is helpful to go the opposite way and sound explicitly *non-accusatory*, with language like:

“Even without meaning to . . .”

“Many of us may not be aware of it, but”

Other research has shown, and Topos testing confirms, that accusatory tones (whether intended or not), or finger-pointing (even if only implicit) can strongly backfire, leading people to dig in and get defensive, doubling down on unhelpful views. So while this language may seem like it's pulling punches or letting people off the hook, it is helpful for both KAC's immediate goals and for creating openness to a richer conversation in the long term.

Share practical, effective solutions

It is important to mention specific, policy-related solutions that can help with the challenges faced by people of color (and other segments), as examples.

The following are similar to examples that were effective in testing, but communicators can also come up with their own.

A program in Washington DC that trains prenatal caregivers to help with stress-related health challenges faced by Black moms has led to higher, more normal birth weights for their babies.

At a school that started offering smaller class sizes, after-school tutoring, and healthy, affordable lunches, kids learned better overall and race-based reading-level differences were virtually eliminated.

Everyone benefits when we use smart programs like paid family leave to continue to close the racial gap so that every Kansan can thrive.

Examples of successful solutions are *engaging and energizing*, and help avoid problem-fatigue and resentment about a topic that can be not only fraught but overwhelming.

They also *aid understanding* by connecting the dots about how a given dynamic works and how it can be avoided.

Finally, examples of good news can help create support for particular policies, including those that Kansas Action for Children is interested in.

The most striking idea is that we have the answers on how to improve reading levels for Latino and African American children yet KS is not putting extra resources towards it yet. (36-year old Asian-American moderate woman, Overland Park)

That better success for disadvantaged kids is really very simple and inexpensive. (64-year old liberal White man, Manhattan)

The next section of the report addresses a key, challenging dynamic in the Kansas landscape, that the recommended approach helps navigate.

KEY CHALLENGE: THE VICIOUS CIRCLE OF RACE DISMISSIVENESS

When it comes to getting White Kansans on board with a race-forward agenda, the primary challenge isn't to change the hearts and minds of people with explicit or deeply committed racist views – although of course there are people like this everywhere, including in Kansas.

Nor is it to fire up those already paying attention.

Instead, the main charge of this project has to do with interrupting what we can call the *vicious circle of race-dismissiveness*, which has specific implications for communicators.

Race-dismissive vs. race-attentive

In Topos's terms, the (very common) “race-dismissive” mindset is held by people who often have no conscious ill-will towards people of color – and in fact, often sincerely wish that they were doing better – but who do not recognize race as the profound factor it actually is in contributing to or determining people's outcomes and life experiences. In addition, one with a “race-dismissive” mindset does not see the ways in which we could collectively make a real difference. Nor are race-dismissive individuals interested in hearing more about these topics. From the race-dismissive perspective, race-based problems are exaggerated, individuals should take responsibility for their own situations, people should stop “complaining,” and anyone who brings up race probably has a hidden (or obvious) agenda.

We all are equal. Just because they are a different race or nationality does not mean they have more rights or freedom as do White people. We all have to work for it. (38-year old conservative White man, Wamego)

No one race has the direct responsibility over another race . . . but it is necessary to help each other, regardless of race to get ahead. Some people are disadvantaged - not necessarily because of race, but environment and family backgrounds. When we have better, we should be more generous; when we know better, we should do better. This has nothing to do with race. (45-year old mixed race conservative woman, Gardner)

This mindset, while not exactly malicious, contributes substantially to the problems faced by people of color, because it actively discourages consideration of change and avoids promoting solutions.

We contrast the race-dismissive mindset with a “race-attentive” mindset, which recognizes the profound and pervasive ways in which race plays a causal role in American life, and that change is a necessity. Importantly, not all self-described progressives are race-attentive. Many White liberals, Democrats, etc., while relatively sympathetic overall, more or less fall into the race-dismissive camp, preferring to focus

on other aspects of progress, social justice and so forth, while paying relatively little attention to race-based dynamics.

A vicious circle

In the context of Kansas culture – and American culture more broadly – there is a vicious circle that perpetuates race-dismissiveness and consistently reinforces the difficulty of getting through to many Whites.

Cultural context: Personal responsibility and implicit bias

First, the broader cultural context includes pervasive messages about personal responsibility, a key American value, reinforced in numerous ways – and deliberately exploited by those who stand to lose money or influence if the balance shifts towards more public responsibility for people’s economic, health, educational and other outcomes. “Personal responsibility” as advocates well know, is used to deflect people’s attention from systemic, structural policy solutions, and leave people left to navigate challenges on their own.

Secondly, it must also be acknowledged that the broader cultural context includes implicit bias against people of color, and particularly, Black people. Numerous studies have established that Americans, often including people of color themselves, tend to have somewhat more negative (implicit, unconscious) attitudes towards images, faces, names, etc. of Black people as opposed to White people.

There's a reason why them people are the way they are, because of how they've been molded their whole life and what they've seen. I can't say that I'm not guilty of stereotyping somebody because of an incident, but I would try to bring myself back and think okay, you never know what somebody went through. (35-year old White conservative woman, Shawnee)

Mutually reinforcing patterns: Obliviousness and Negativity

Given this cultural milieu, the more specific vicious circle related to the dialog about race involves *obliviousness* on one hand – an almost baffling lack of awareness about certain facts and patterns – and a set of *negative attitudes* on the other, including fatigue, resentment and negative judgments.

Resentment emerges in various forms, such as the sense that “nobody talks about the obstacles that I’ve overcome” or anger about being made to feel guilty, or asked to “help” those who “don’t deserve it.” Negativity also includes “fatigue” at hearing about race yet again, and moral condemnation of people who seem to be “takers.”

I'm tired of considering racial designation. Everybody should promote helping everyone. We're all in this together. (55-year old liberal Hispanic man, Lawrence)

Obliviousness, too, has various aspects, as people seem blind not only to the suffering of many people of color, but to what a race aware person would see as the obvious patterns of discrimination that lead to suffering – in domains from health care to criminal justice to hiring to education – and to the ways in which policies could make a positive difference. (Note that we use the term “oblivious,” with its mild negative connotations, because it seems clear that everyone has many, many opportunities to learn about race-based topics. To refer to simple “lack of awareness” would gloss over people’s active dismissal of the facts.)

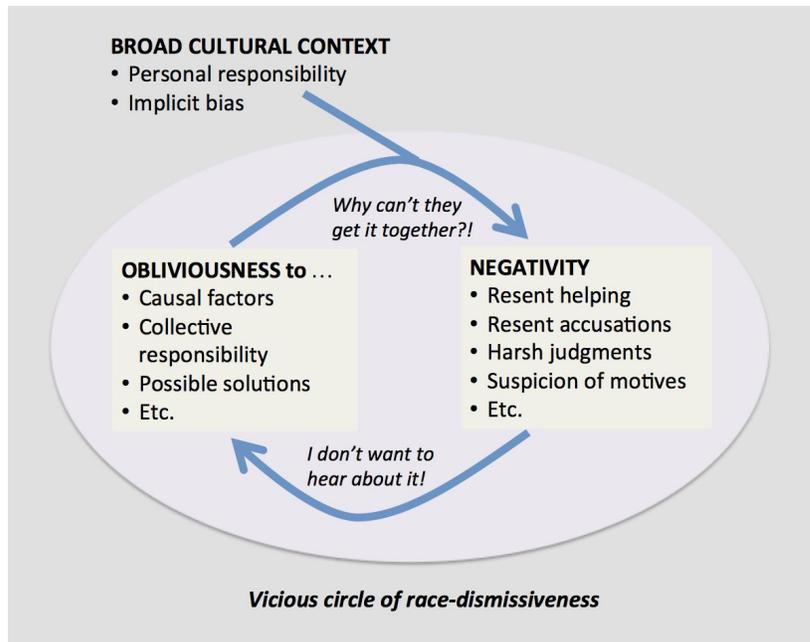
Universal health help may help "minorities" with their babies and children, but I just don't believe they are worse off than others. (50-year old liberal White woman, Salina)

I wish I knew the answer because then maybe I could fix it . . . I don't know. I wish I did. Look at when the Irish and Italians came over here. They managed to somehow bring themselves up and make a decent living and provide for their families and not end up in terrible crime-ridden areas and millions in jail. I don't know. (59-year old liberal White woman, Larned)

These two patterns – obliviousness and negativity – feed each other in ways that help account for the stubborn difficulty of shifting attitudes in positive directions. When people believe in personal responsibility and are “unaware” of the many ways in which race plays a significant causal role, they *tend towards negative judgments about those who are doing less well overall*. In turn, if people are resentful about people of color’s “complaints” and suspicious about the agendas of those who bring up race, they are less likely to be interested in or open to new information. Negative attitudes tend to make obliviousness more likely—and obliviousness makes it all the more difficult to enact race-forward policies.

To put the vicious circle dynamic in a nutshell: If you don't know you're not going to care, and if you don't care, you're not going to learn. For race-dismissive people, any mention of racial inequality results in an immediate justification for a mental shut-down.

In the end, the vicious circle is a powerful cognitive, emotional and social dynamic that leaves race-dismissive folks feeling that their view of the world is self-evidently correct, and that people “on the other side” are manipulative, agenda-driven, and flat-out wrong.



Implications for communicators

The key reason to explore the dynamics above – some of which simply affirm patterns communicators are already familiar with – is to help clarify why some communications approaches tend to be ineffective at best.

Lack of understanding

Communications sometimes assume a set of premises that audiences don't actually share. When used among race-attentive individuals, the word "race" serves as convenient shorthand for a familiar reality – a complex set of substantive connections and social dynamics. But the term does not have nearly the same set of meanings for race-dismissive folks. More broadly, many in the Kansas (and broader U.S.) audience are simply not likely to understand the implications of certain facts and ideas because they aren't aware of the causes and effects involved, for instance.

I feel like that's just what you hear people talk about now. When I was growing up, you would hear your grandparents talk about segregation and things, but it didn't affect you, you know? We all got along, and now it seems like there's more of a border between races and different people. (27-year old liberal White man, Reno)

I'm not aware of [barriers]. When I go to the hospital there are all races there - all ethnic groups - the doctors, the people working in the hospital . . . and they treat everybody equally well. I don't know that people don't have access because

of their race . . . I don't see anybody being thrown out. (90-year old conservative White man, Overland Park)

Pushback and backfiring regarding disparities

Most pointedly, the vicious circle dynamic means that many communications can lead to negative consequences. Advocates tend – for some very good reasons, including moral outrage and expert awareness – to focus on (unfair) disparities between the *outcomes* for Whites and people of color. But this emphasis actually *backfires* with race-dismissive people because it plays right into the oblivious-resentment-resistance dynamic. They hear it as disingenuous harping on “problems” that have nothing to do with them, and may not even exist, fueling the vicious circle.

In western Kansas, there's quite a bit of Hispanic influence, and I think it's important that while we embrace minorities, we also leave plenty of opportunity for people who are not minorities. I think it can get carried away in that we are giving special preference to minorities. (32-year old White conservative woman, Hugoton)

Whites experience racism as well. I have been denied assistance, while someone who is a different race, who has more than I do, is approved without the bat of an eye. (26-year old moderate White woman Manhattan)

It's not just the Black people. It's not the other races. It's White race that's struggling, too ... that gets treated unfair, but nobody ever points that out. (27-year old White conservative woman, Parsons)

DIRECTIONS THAT MISS THE MARK

To appreciate more fully how recommended directions work, it is always helpful to consider the ways that other directions lead thinking astray, provoke pushback, leave people indifferent, are misinterpreted, or simply don't have the same impact.

Importantly, this discussion applies to given directions *when treated as focal, organizing ideas*. In many cases, and unless noted, the ideas may be fine to mention or include in a communication, but not as the core, emphasized theme.

The future will be more diverse

Increasing diversity is a dynamic people already know; emphasizing it does little to advance people's thinking.

Kansans, like many other Americans, often share a sense that their state is inevitably becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. The hypothesis for focusing on this dynamic is that if audiences see this as an inevitability, with both pros and cons, and as a process that can be handled well or poorly, perhaps they can see race-forward policies as a way of navigating change well.

Sample language:

Like the rest of the country, Kansas is growing and changing. There are new kinds of jobs, new technologies, and lots of new people - and we're getting more racially diverse, in both the cities and the rural parts of the state. There are lots of exciting things about this change, and if we're smart about it, we can steer away from potential problems like big economic gaps between people of different races. Instead, there are proven ways of making sure everyone has a good opportunity to thrive and contribute to our state – such as

Unfortunately, the research yielded little evidence of positive effects from this focus. The emphasis on a changing state seems too far removed from the topic of race-forward policies, so that the direction sometimes triggers focus on irrelevant kinds of change. Ultimately, this kind of discussion simply has little effect on people's thinking about the real topics the research is about.

It's not [significant], because I reject the idea that we should treat people based solely on their race and background. We should treat everyone as individuals. (32-year old conservative White man, Topeka)

Explaining Targeted Universalism

Focusing on targeted universalism as a sensible policy approach can either fail to engage people, or can allow race to fall out of the conversation.

Sample language:

To have a good chance at success in life, kids need basic things like good nutrition, access to doctors and dentists, affordable childcare, and so forth. To make sure all Kansas kids get a strong start, experts say we need an approach called “targeted universalism.” It’s universal, because the goal is for everyone. It’s targeted because different communities have different needs. In some counties, maybe we need a new bus line to help with distance and rural isolation. In communities of color we might need trainings for healthcare workers to take into account racism, language issues and social isolation. ... One size doesn’t fit all when it comes to getting children launched in life, which is why targeted universalism is a growing trend around the country.

While it sometimes intrigues people, and sounds sensible, this direction ultimately falls short because most people are not engaged and energized by explicit discussion of a *policy approach*.

Takeaways were often on point in a general sense – regarding how solutions can’t be one-size-fits-all – but connections to race in particular were weak or ignored (i.e. research participants referred back to differences other than race-based ones) or triggered pushback because the message hadn’t succeeded in reframing this challenging topic effectively.

All kids are not equal, some need different thing than others. (46-year old conservative White man, Alta Vista)

Building on the Kansas cultural value of pulling together

A focus on the idea that Kansans help each other out doesn’t explain a focus on race, and can even clash with it.

Sample language:

Kansans are self-reliant, but they also come together to help each other, since it can be tougher to get by than it used to be, and it’s better for all of us when we all have a chance to thrive. With programs from crop insurance to public universities to the social safety net we make sure that we support each other, for everyone’s benefit. Another good example is state funding for high-quality pre-K childcare,

which helps working families keep working, and also narrows the gaps between the rich and poor, between country and city folk, and between Whites and people of color. This is an example of Kansans coming together to help each other, and the state as a whole.

Because early rounds of research confirmed a culture of mutual aid among Kansans – helping each other out in emergencies, and so forth – some messages attempted to apply this value to the situation of many people of color. Unfortunately, many race-dismissive Kansans see a contradiction between the idea of coming together, and the mention of race – which they tend to see as a divisive topic.

An additional problem is that the direction fails to help audiences gain an understanding of the challenge, so that the implication of “special help” for people of color remains unjustified and provocative.

Finally, and perhaps not surprisingly, the idea of helping each other – which has a very interpersonal feel – isn’t naturally linked with policy, except by some liberals already committed to social policy solutions.

Everyone needs help once and a while but in the end we all need to stand on our own two feet. (60-year old moderate White woman, Belle Plaine)

I tend to overlook the racial aspect of helping others and just help where it is easiest to help. (67-year old conservative White woman, Coffeyville)

Addressing a history of discrimination

Tying today’s disparities to past discrimination reinforces the vicious circle of race dismissiveness.

Instead of blaming current racism or other factors, one can appeal to the legacy of the past and the need to correct for cumulative wrongs, whether or not actions in the present day continue to exacerbate racial injustice.

Sample language:

Experts look at the statistical disparities in wealth, wages and living standards between the average White person in contrast to Blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans - and they say that since we caused this - with discrimination against them stretching back generations - we need policies that correct that. That we can't be colorblind or have colorblind policies until the disparities are erased. For example, if we really wanted to increase access to health care for everyone, we'd need to make sure that communications were done in both Spanish and English, and we might even need to open clinics in Black and Native American communities that have been underserved.

Unfortunately, many research participants responded with defensiveness and resentment. This approach can easily fall into the “accusation” trap, sounding like a broad condemnation of White behavior. (“It wasn’t me!” “Now you’re talking about discriminating against White people.”)

Overall, the approach fails to reach the broad audiences that are the focus of the project, and leaves race-dismissive individuals feeling people of color need to step up rather than “keep looking backward” to the past.

*We can't make everything equal, it's up to you to make that happen for yourself.
(36-year old liberal White man, Wichita)*

[Black people] always bring up slavery and how we owe them. We don't owe them anything because they never went thru it, they think the world owes them for the mistreatment towards their ancestors but my White forefathers fought and died defending to abolish slavery . . . So how are they remembered? By so many Blacks still blaming the Whites for it all. (48-year old conservative White man, Wichita)

Closing disparities through universal policies

Messages calling for policies that narrow racial disparities while treating Whites and people of color identically were often misread as “special treatment” for people of color.

Sample language

Experts say that the best ways to reduce the economic disparities between White people, Black people and Hispanics is to do the things that help ALL Kansans, through programs that help poor and working people join the middle class and help them stay there – like setting up a statewide system for paid family leave or making health care more accessible, ideas that have worked in other states.

Unfortunately, this approach steps right into the basic trap of assuming people agree that race-based, disparate outcomes need to be addressed through public action. Kansans who might otherwise support the particular policies sometimes bristled at the rationale, which is about closing gaps that they feel are probably exaggerated and any in case not their concern. Texts like the one above can even be (mis)read as promoting “special treatment,” though the language is explicitly about policies to help everyone!

The whole premise that someone needs more help just because of their skin color is very offensive to me. Work ethic and attitude is what makes a person successful not skin color. (68-year old White conservative man, Wichita)

Creating programs that give greater advantage to some based on skin color . . . is not fair and creates more conflict and division. (55-year old conservative White woman, Gardner)

CONCLUSION

Some Kansans, including some White progressives, understand and acknowledge the profound ways in which race affects Kansans' (and Americans') life chances, and how everyone can play a collective role in making those chances more equal. For these race-attentive folks, race is already an important focus. Other Kansans have stubborn, racist views that are unlikely to be moved by any strategy. This project is not focused on communicating with either of those audiences.

Instead it is about promoting explicitly race-forward agenda in Kansas by reaching the much larger group of race-dismissive people who would ordinarily ignore or even bristle at "yet another" discussion of race. Their engagement and support will ultimately be critical for successful policy change.

By focusing on an approach that acknowledges and points out race-based obstacles and solutions, while not framing them as the only ones that matter, the recommended strategy puts a broad cross-section of Kansans into a constructive mindset. It can not only set the stage for a productive conversation in the short term, it creates an onramp for further learning and richer discussions of the profoundly important topic of race in Kansas.

APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH MATERIALS

Below are further details on the three phases of Topos research that contribute to this report: Cognitive Elicitations, Small Group Conversations, and Talkback Testing. Also included are examples of tested messages and sample interview questions and protocols.

Methodology

Cognitive Elicitations

The earliest phase of research entailed 16 recorded and transcribed in-depth telephone interviews conducted in February and March 2019 with members of the Kansas public. The goal of these semi-structured interviews is to approximate a natural conversation while also encouraging the subject to reason about a topic from a wide variety of perspectives, including some that are unexpected and deliberately challenging. One of the key goals of elicitations is to encourage subjects to think aloud about the issue, rather than reproduce opinions they have stated or may have heard before. The conversations ranged from 30-60 minutes and were recorded and transcribed for close analysis.

The analysis of elicitations data, based on principles of cognitive anthropology and linguistics – yields insights not available from standard interview, polling, or focus group techniques. It does not look for statements of opinion, but for patterns of thought that may even be unconscious. It does not look for familiarity with issues in the news, but for more default reasoning patterns, that are likely to be stable and durable. Some of the clues to these important patterns come from topics that are omitted, moments of inconsistency where one understanding clashes with another, and the metaphors people use to talk about a subject. Furthermore, the method is designed to explore the differences between rhetorical mode – in which people define themselves in opposition to other groups and perspectives, and repeat ideas and phrases familiar from public discourse – and reasonable mode – in which they reflect their own experiences, think for themselves, and are more open to new information. Put briefly, this analysis focuses on how people think rather than what they think.

Small Group Conversations

At the heart of a strong narrative are simple, easily embraced ideas that people can readily comprehend and communicate to others. In this testing format, two to four participants join a researcher on the phone for approximately 30 minutes, and respond both to materials and to each other. The process allows researchers to learn about individual responses to messages, and, importantly, how ideas fare in the course of an interaction – e.g. whether certain ideas stick as important touch points that participants return to. Importantly, these conversations yield insights about current, default attitudes, as well as assessing responses to various message strategies. A sample of

participants were drawn from all around Kansas and were diverse in terms of age, politics, household income and education.

For this effort Topos researchers conducted 14 small groups (with a total sample of 38 individuals) in March and April 2019. The groups were used to uncover and refine language and core narrative ideas that could be used in TalkBack testing.

Talkback Testing

In Topos’s unique TalkBack method, subjects are presented with brief texts (roughly 80-150 words) and then asked several open-ended questions, focusing in part on subjects’ ability to *repeat the core of the message, or pass it along to others*.

TalkBack texts generally convey a few key concepts, such as a particular aspect of a complex issue like conservation. New terms are often introduced as well in order to test their clarity and memorability. Importantly, one of the purposes of TalkBack—and the Topos approach in general—is to explore *what is taken away from a message, as opposed to what is intended*. It is often the case that listeners hear something quite different from what the speaker meant to convey. (One of the shortcomings of testing approaches that focus on “agreement” or enthusiasm is that they can inadvertently measure responses to *a point that was heard but not intended*.)

Parameters of success include subjects’ ability to remember, explain, use and repeat the explanatory ideas and key terms. The testing is designed to assess whether a given idea has the capacity to become an organizing principle for thinking and communicating in a new way about the issue—as well as its overall effects on reasoning and engagement.

In TalkBack Testing each subject read a single brief text, responded to questions some of which required them repeat aspects of the content. TalkBack Testing is a tool for determining whether an idea is clear and memorable, whether it leads to the right kinds of thinking, and can serve as an effective “organizing idea” for communications. This is a far higher bar than most research methods attempt to achieve, but one that we feel is essential to developing a truly effective communications strategy with potential to shift perspectives.

For this research, Talkback Testing was completed into two rounds, the first in May and June 2019 with 16 texts of roughly 125 words each. Over 360 Kansans participated in the testing.

Texts are listed below.

Sample Message texts

Variations on these messages were tested with people in Small Group Conversations as well as TalkBack testing. Note that these should not be read as messages being designed

and evaluated, but instead as tests to see how particular language and “idea units” survive this particular kind of experiment.

Surprising obstacles

Many of us aren’t aware of it, but there are many surprising, hidden obstacles that people of color face in Kansas, and elsewhere, that make it harder to get ahead, or even get through the day. For example, doctors statistically spend fewer minutes talking with patients who aren’t white. Black shoppers are more likely to be falsely accused of stealing. White EMTs and med students often falsely believe Black patients have thicker skin and higher pain tolerance than whites, so they don’t worry about their comfort as much. A recent study in the Midwest even found that a white job applicant with a felony record has better odds of getting a call back than a black applicant with the same resume and a clean record. The good news is that there are proven ways to reduce these hidden obstacles, so everyone has a good opportunity to thrive.

Win win - Paid family leave

Experts on reducing gaps between Whites and people of color -- in health, wealth etc. -- say Kansas can do that with approaches that make things better for everyone in the state. For example, when employees have some paid family leave to take care of a sick family member, it helps Kansas attract and keep good workers in the state, and it offers everyone a bit more peace of mind. And paid family leave is particularly helpful for workers of color, because they’re more likely to have jobs that don’t offer this basic protection, so they’re more likely to lose their jobs if someone in the family gets sick and needs care. Win-win steps like this can make our state more equal, and boost the state as a whole at the same time.

Proven programs for kids

In the past couple of generations, gaps between races have narrowed in Kansas and the US, and there are proven, successful programs that will narrow the gaps even more. For example, we know that kids who participate in quality early education and care programs do better in school, work and health all the way to adulthood. Making these programs available in communities of color reduces race gaps. Also, due to extra stresses that Black moms face regardless of income or education, their babies tend to have lower birth weight than white babies. But a program in Washington DC that trains prenatal caregivers to help with the stress and health challenges faced by Black women has led to birth weights that are nearly a pound higher. Everyone benefits when we use smart programs like these to continue to close the racial gap so every Kansan can thrive.

Kansans come together

Kansans are self-reliant, but they also come together to help each other, since it can be tougher to get by than it used to be, and it’s better for all of us when we all have a chance to thrive. With programs from crop insurance to public universities to the social safety net we make sure that we support each other, for everyone’s benefit. Another good example is state funding for high-quality pre-K childcare, which helps working families keep working, and also

narrows the gaps between the rich and poor, between country and city folk, and between whites and people of color. This is an example of Kansans coming together to help each other, and the state as a whole.

Navigating change

Like the rest of the country, Kansas is growing and changing. There are new kinds of jobs, new technologies, and lots of new people - and we're getting more racially diverse, in both the cities and the rural parts of the state. There are lots of exciting things about this change, and if we're smart about it, we can avoid some of the problems other states have experienced, like big economic gaps between people of different races. Instead, there are proven ways of making sure everyone has a good opportunity to thrive and contribute to our state – like making sure there's affordable pre-K in the communities where it's needed, and training health providers to understand any particular challenges people of different backgrounds and races face.

Targeted Universalism

To have a good chance at success in life, kids need basic things like good nutrition, access to doctors and dentists, affordable childcare, and so forth. To make sure all Kansas kids get a strong start, experts say we need an approach called “targeted universalism.” It's universal, because the goal is for everyone. It's targeted because different communities have different needs. In some counties, maybe we need a new bus line to help with distance and rural isolation. In communities of color we might need trainings for healthcare workers to take into account racism, language issues and social isolation. In a wealthy suburb it might be hidden pockets of poverty where kids need free breakfast. One size doesn't fit all when it comes to getting children launched in life, which is why targeted universalism is a growing trend around the country.

Race Forward I

More and more groups in Kansas are saying we need “race forward” policies in the state. We already have programs to give a hand to those who are poor or rurally isolated or physically disabled. Race-forward policies means ones that recognize that people of color experience some additional barriers that Whites don't when it comes to health, housing, schooling, and so on. Race-forward policies means practical ways to make things more even for everyone. For example, creating more quality early education helps kids thrive in school, work, and health all the way to adulthood, and helps narrow the race gap. And when health care providers get training about cultural diversity, it's been proven to boost maternal health and reduce the higher rates of infant mortality among Black babies. Race-forward means Kansas can focus on proven, policies that have worked elsewhere to reduce these barriers to equality and help the state as a whole.

Targeted Universalism: Infant mortality

To make sure all Kansas kids get a strong start, experts say we need an approach called “targeted universalism.” It's universal, because the goal is for everyone. For example, we want a lower infant mortality rate for kids born in Kansas. It's targeted because different

communities have different needs. For example, Black moms face a much higher mortality rate, regardless of their education and income, so we need to take some extra steps, like making sure Black neighborhoods have after-hours clinics open and transportation is available to prenatal doctor visits. Training programs for health care providers about cultural diversity have also been shown to help in Hispanic and African American communities. And small towns might have different needs from bigger cities. One size doesn't fit all when it comes to getting children launched in life, which is why targeted universalism is a growing trend around the country.

Childbirth & Stress

Pregnancy and childbirth are very stressful for mother and child – and the US has one of the highest rates of infant mortality in the developed world, in part because we don't do things we could be doing to help with that stress. For example, balancing money and work adds to the stress, so states with paid family leave laws or maternity leave help improve health. Black mothers often have the extra stress of dealing with racism directed at them. One program in Washington DC that focused on training health care providers to recognize and change their own race biases actually improved birth weights ounce for ounce among Black infants. Getting infants and children off to the best possible start is important for all Kansans and there are ways we can reduce stress and improve the health of our kids.

Parents & Values

Everyone in Kansas wants our kids to be healthy, happy, and have the opportunity to achieve their dreams. Because different communities have different needs we use various strategies to give every child their best shot in life. Rural communities might need one thing while immigrant communities might need something else. One thing Black communities particularly need is better access to prenatal care, because Black moms often face extra stresses that have impacts on childbirth. The goals for our kids are the same everywhere, but we need different solutions in different communities.

Reading Level

Experts working to raise reading levels among Black and Latino students in Kansas found that the most important fixes would actually apply to any classroom: smaller class sizes, after-school tutoring, and healthy, affordable lunches. At a school that started offering all these things, 90% of 3rd graders are now reading at grade level. It turns out we already know what we need to do to create more successful classrooms in Kansas.

Paid Family Leave 2

All of us face challenges such as getting sick, or needing to take care of an elderly parent, injured spouse or newborn child. But the fact is that some of us get good benefits while others get none. And if you live in a small town, or are Black, a new immigrant, or a young parent starting a family, you are less likely to have a job with benefits that let you take care of your family. Workplace protections should not be left up to the generosity of an individual employer. Instead, all workers by law should have some guaranteed minimum paid time off for things like illness or the birth of a child.

Collective Responsibility

Kansas has a bright future as long as we continue to focus on both individual responsibility and collective responsibility. We all understand that individually, people need to learn skills, work hard and apply themselves. The other half of what we need for success is the collective responsibility to create things like schools, healthcare facilities, and job protections that help every family and community thrive. Life can be tough for many hard-working families, and especially so for Blacks and Latinos in our state. But there are ways to make sure that when people take individual responsibility, it will pay off.

Structural Bias

“Structural bias” isn’t about whether any individuals have biased views. It’s about the impact of laws and investments over time, which results in some communities thriving and others struggling. Here in Kansas we have invested public money in some communities much more than others. If one community has great schools, safe streets, health care and parks, and the other does not, which one is going to thrive? Even if there are no “racists” there can be structural bias - and the good news is that this is something we can solve, through changes to our laws and investments.

Segment challenges

A “segment challenge” is a hardship faced by a particular group – that others may find hard to relate to. (Experts call parts of the population “segments.”) Some of the people in a particular group – male, female, country or city, lower-income, white, minority, disabled etc. – can usually get by despite the segment challenges they face, but there are also things the state can do to make things easier. For instance, people who live in lower-income small-town areas may have a tough time getting to work or the doctor – so we can push for more bus routes. Another segment challenge has to do with Black medical patients – it turns out that without even realizing it, doctors tend to spend fewer minutes talking to them, and underestimate the discomfort they’re in. But trainings for medical professionals are proven to lead to better outcomes for Black patients.

Investment

Everyone knows if you invest more in one community than another, the one that gets more will probably thrive more – better schools, better sidewalks, better public safety, parks, healthcare, and so forth. And these choices about where we invest public money have effects that build over time, as one community thrives and another crumbles. For example, scientists who studied what happens when states invest in supporting better childcare options found that dollar for dollar it more than paid off down the line with children who succeed better in school and adults with higher rates of employment, better wages, higher education and lower rates of crime. The payoff for this kind of thing is highest in many communities where people of color live, who have traditionally received less of this kind of investment.

Targeted Universalism - Healthy Food

Imagine that Kansas had a goal to make sure that every child had access to healthy food every day. Experts say that we need a program of “targeted universalism”. It’s *universal*, because the goal is the same for everyone - access to a healthy meal every day. It’s *targeted* because to get there we need to target different communities differently. In some counties you have to take into account distance and rural isolation. For Hispanics it might have to take into account racism, language issues and social isolation. In a wealthy suburb it might be hidden pockets of poverty. One size doesn’t fit all, which is why targeted universalism makes sense.

All Kansans

Some experts say that the best ways to reduce the economic disparities between White people, Black people and Hispanics is to do the things that help ALL Kansans, including having programs that help poor and working people join the middle class and help them stay there. Things like setting up a statewide system for *paid family leave* or unemployment insurance or *making health care more accessible* have worked in other states to make families less vulnerable to the kinds of problems that threaten to derail and set back progress in life, whether that’s a health issue, a loss of a job, or dealing with prejudice and discrimination.

Race Forward 2

More and more groups in Kansas are emphasizing the importance of “race forward” policies in the state. Race-forward policies means ones that recognize that people of color/non-whites experience barriers that whites don’t when it comes to health, housing, schooling, and so on - and that there are practical, effective ways to move the state as a whole forward by reducing these barriers. The idea is that Kansas can focus on proven, race-forward policies that have worked elsewhere. One example is training programs for health care providers about cultural diversity, which reduce racial disparities in infant mortality and maternal health, especially in Hispanic and African American communities.

Public Investment

Experts who study why some communities thrive more than others say the answer has a lot to do with which communities get and don’t get public investments – in things like schools, roads or healthcare, which every community needs. Right now some Kansas communities have a lot more funding to work with, and often the ones that get less investment are rural communities as well as those where more minority families tend to live. A statewide effort to balance our investments more evenly can do a lot to reduce rural-urban and racial differences in health, education, and wealth.

Conditions for Success

Experts who study why some communities and some states thrive more than others say it has to do with creating the conditions for success. We can’t make sure everyone succeeds, but we can create the conditions that make it more likely. Conditions for success include education and training, public safety, access to health care, affordable housing, decent wages, child care and so on. Right now the way Kansas both collects and spends tax money supports some places better than others, and very often the ones where we don’t see the

conditions for success are rural communities as well as those where people of color tend to live. A statewide effort to balance conditions more evenly can do a lot to reduce rural-urban and racial differences in health, education, wealth, and success.

Targeted Universalism 3 Examples

Kansas will thrive when everyone has access to opportunity, and there are plenty of good ideas for how the state could help.

- Children's savings accounts are a proven way to build assets (and financial literacy) and using some public money to start and seed these accounts for children in families with low incomes can have a big impact.
- Training programs for health care providers about cultural diversity can decrease racial disparities in infant mortality and maternal health, especially in Hispanic and African American communities.
- Subsidizing child care providers who are open at night makes it possible for parents in low-income jobs to do shift-work.

Disparities

Just five miles, and yet a world apart. One side of town has a new high school while on the other side of town the high school is more than 50 years old, with all the maintenance problems you'd expect. One side of town has a popular park, while the other has vacant lots. It's a pattern that repeats itself across the state. The end result is kids on one side of town, typically the white kids, get a better start in life. That's wrong and there's plenty we can do about it. If we invest more in the communities that have been getting the short end of the stick, we will not only give every kid a fair shot at success, we will move our state forward as a whole, as everyone gets a chance to live up to their potential.

Foundations for Kids

Every Kansas child deserves to get the best possible start in life. We know that the investments we make in the early years -- from early education, to health care and so on -- create a foundation for growth and development that lasts a lifetime. In many places in Kansas, we're providing children with a solid foundation. But we have to face the fact that we have not been providing a solid foundation of great education, health care and healthy community spaces for EVERY Kansas child. Too many rural communities and communities of color have been neglected. To make our state the best place to raise and be a child, we have to confront the legacies of unfairness created by this historic lack of investment in people of color. Our future depends on all of us coming together to ensure every child gets a great start in life.

Sample Questions for Elicitations (in-depth one on one interviews)

[Note that interviews were semi-structured, with researchers doing a combination of choosing from the following questions and probing on other topics as they arose.]

We're not expecting you to be an expert on this topic, and it's not a quiz about your knowledge on public issues. We just want to understand what Kansans think about some topics. The first question is very open-ended:

1. What makes for a thriving community? [probe additional: schools, health systems, infrastructure, social safety net, etc.]
 - a. Are there any particular areas where you think Kansas excels?
 - b. What about where the state maybe falls short or could do more?
 - c. What other steps can we take to help everyone in Kansas have an opportunity to succeed?
2. One change that's coming up in Kansas is that the state is expected to become a lot more diverse racially and ethnically as people move here from other places to work and raise their families. What do you see as the challenges in that and the opportunities for Kansas? [probe for pros and cons]
3. The state wants to make sure people are welcomed, making sure they have what they need to get settled here and get started making a go of it in Kansas communities. What kinds of things could the state do to make this as smooth a transition as possible for everyone?
4. Just speaking from your own point of view, what's the minimum that every person should have access to in Kansas? [probe for food, shelter, medical care, security, child care/pre-school, college]
 - a. What about freedom from discrimination?
 - b. [When they draw the line] Why *shouldn't* we guarantee people access to [X]?
5. Anyone can find themselves struggling financially, but some groups seem to have a tougher time, including the elderly, young families, Blacks and Hispanics. Why do you think these kinds of people are overrepresented (among the poor)? [probe]
 - a. How do people get out of those situations?
 - b. Are there things that we as a society can do to help?
 - c. Do we need to target those groups *differently* with programs?
 - d. [if necessary, probe about the role race or racism plays]
6. Imagine we had a goal to make sure that every child in Kansas had access to healthy food every day; they aren't hungry.
 - a. What reasons can you imagine for why one child has enough healthy food each day and another doesn't
 - b. How do we ensure that the kids who don't have enough healthy food get it?

7. If you were trying to set up this program, would you want a program that treated every county and every child exactly the same - or would it make sense to tailor it differently among different counties or different groups of people?
 - a. What kinds of differences might you want to take into account (other than the age of the child)? [for example rural versus urban?]
 - b. Does race or racism create any sort of unique challenges for meeting the goals? (why / why not?)
 - c. What about households where English may not be the first language? (What if it meant that we needed to spend some extra money or have a special program to reach some of the Hispanic kids?)
8. Imagine that every company and corporation had to chip in to a fund so that when an employee had to take a few days off to look after a sick child or elderly parent - they could get some paid leave until they could get back to work?
 - a. What's your reaction to something like that?
 - b. (If it happened) how might that change things for people? (In your community? In Kansas as a whole?)
 - c. Do you think too many people would misuse that? [If so, ask them to imagine a scenario and probe for details]
 - d. This would be an especially big help for Blacks and Hispanics many of whom are in low wage work, without benefits. What's your reaction to that?
 - e. Do you think this would close the disparity in wealth and income that exists between Whites and Blacks and Hispanics? (Why / why not?)
 - f. If we don't have a program like this, what happens to a vulnerable family when a parent has to choose between staying with a sick child and losing a week's pay and maybe even their job?
9. As I mentioned earlier, Kansas is becoming a much more diverse place in terms of race and ethnicity, but not everyone has been welcoming. Blacks and Hispanics often face discrimination in terms of pay and opportunity and some people are saying we need to do more get out in front of that issue with policies that make sure brown and Black families don't get stuck. For example, the state can do more to subsidize child care to help out working families, and support early education programs. It's one way to ensure that the gap between white, black and brown families doesn't get entrenched or even grow.
 - a. What's your reaction to hearing a plan like that? [probe]
10. The US - including Kansas - has a much higher infant mortality rate compared to other developed countries. One reason is that it is tough for young families to afford consistent health care. But experts say the reason Black women have the highest infant mortality rates of all has to do with the toxic stress of dealing with racism - both inside and outside the medical field. Negative treatment creates stress, impacts people's health and makes pregnancy and birth especially tough. So one way to improve infant mortality

rates is to make sure health care providers get extra training to help the expectant mothers with the greatest health challenges.

- a. What is your reaction to that?
 - b. What can we do about that?
 - c. What about taking the extra step of helping Black women in particular, the group that has the very highest infant mortality rate? (perhaps by giving doctors and nurses cultural training?)
 - d. Any misgivings?
11. Some experts say that the best ways to reduce the economic disparities between White people, Black people and Hispanics is to do the things that help ALL Kansans, including having programs that help poor and working people join the middle class and help them stay there.
- a. Does that make sense?
 - b. Things we've been talking about like setting up a statewide system for *paid family leave* or *making health care more accessible*, have worked in other states. Do you think they could work in Kansas?
 - c. And what about closing the gap when it comes to race and ethnicity?
12. Other experts look at the statistical disparities in wealth, wages and living standards between the average White person in contrast to Blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans - and they say that since we caused this - with discrimination against them stretching back generations - we need policies that correct that. That we can't be colorblind or have colorblind policies until the disparities are erased.
- a. What's your reaction to that?
 - b. For example, if we really wanted to increase access to health care for everyone, we'd need to make sure that communications were done in both Spanish and English, and we might even need to open clinics in Black and Native American communities that have been underserved. What would you think of that?
 - c. Any other ideas on what can be done?
13. Kansans chose cutting taxes - especially for corporations and the wealthy - over collecting taxes and spending the money on those sorts of efforts. What's your take on that?
14. What would you say to someone who said that none of these programs and policies would be necessary if people just stood up and took responsibility for themselves?
- a. [If subject agrees] Do you think we shouldn't have programs like this at all?
[probe]

IF TIME ALLOWS:

15. What kinds of programs do you know about for Kansans who maybe are struggling to get by?

16. If you were going to make the case to someone else why tax dollars should go to this sort of thing, what would you say? [probe for how might it help *everyone* - not just the direct beneficiary]

WRAP-UP

17. Of all the things we've talked about today, what strikes you the most? What might you walk away thinking about?

18. What do you wish people understood about this topic (that they often don't seem to get)?

Sample Questions for Small Group conversations (2-4 subjects in conversation)

[Note that interviews were semi-structured, with researchers doing a combination of choosing from the following questions and probing on other topics as they arose, including directions that emerged from subject interactions.]

1. In your opinion, what makes for a thriving community? [probe additional: schools, health systems, infrastructure, social safety net, etc.]
 - a. Are there any particular areas where you think Kansas excels?
 - b. What about where the state maybe falls short or could do more?

I'd like to run past you some of the ideas that are out there on this topic and hear what you think about them. I'll read you a statement and get your feedback.

TEXT 1 [read once and ask if they'd like to hear it again]

2. (Before we get to your reaction to that) If you were going to pass on to a friend what you heard there - in your own words, how would you put it?
3. What's your reaction to what you just heard?
4. [if needed] What parts of that do you agree with or disagree with?

TEXT 2 [read once and ask if they'd like to hear it again]

5. What's your reaction to what you just heard?
6. What's the main point of that statement we heard?

TEXT 3 [read once and ask if they'd like to hear it again]

7. (Before we get to your reaction to that) If you were going to pass on to a friend what you heard there - in your own words, how would you put it?
8. What's your reaction to what you just heard?

WRAP-UP

9. When you think back on all of the things we've talked about today, when it comes to the disparity between whites and people of color in terms of income, wealth, etc. do you think the sorts of policies we've been talking about can do something to close those disparities?
10. What would you say to someone who said we wouldn't need policies and programs if people just stood up and took responsibility for themselves?
11. Of all the things we've talked about today, what strikes you the most? What might you walk away thinking about?
12. What do you wish people understood about this topic (that they often don't seem to get)?

Sample TalkBack questions (in on-line survey)

[Note that each participant saw only a single text, and then responded (online) to a set of questions roughly like the following.]

Please read the following statement carefully, because you'll be asked several questions about it.

TEXT

Without going back to read the statement again, what do you remember of the main ideas? Please write at least two sentences in your own words as if you were sharing these ideas with a friend.

How is this topic significant for you or for others you know? Please explain why or why not.

If you had the chance to ask an expert, what would you like clarified about the ideas you read about in the paragraph?

Suppose you were having a discussion about this topic with a friend or relative who said, "It's not the responsibility of White people to take special steps to help Black or Latino people to get ahead. If they want equal success they are going to have to do that themselves." How would you respond?

If you were explaining to a friend the key idea in the paragraph you read, what would you say?

What idea or ideas mentioned in this survey are the most striking to you? Why?

How interested would you be in receiving further information about this topic?

