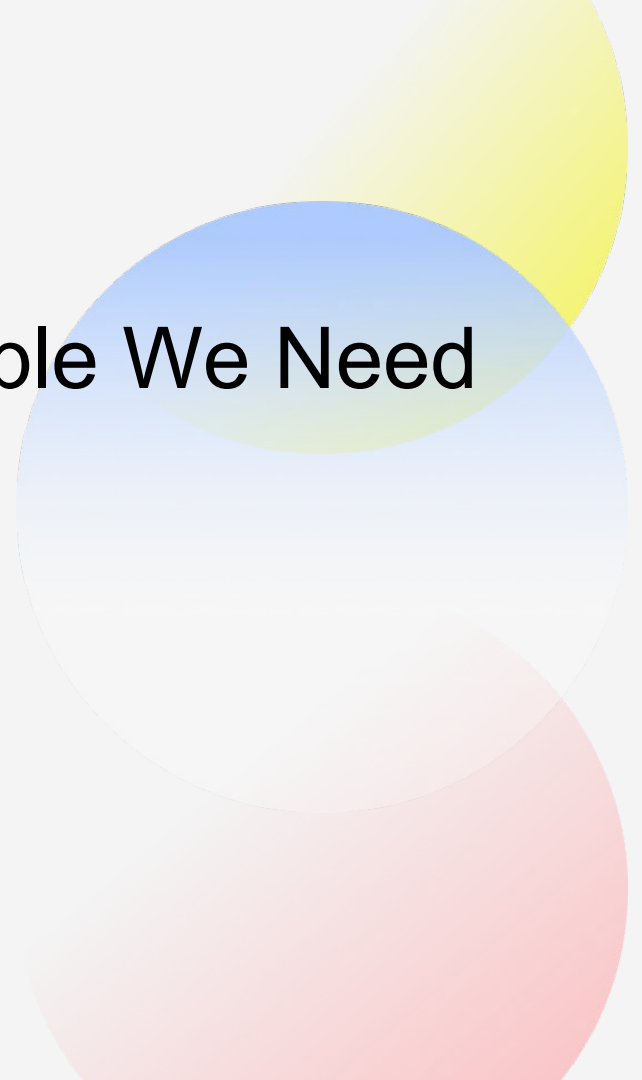


Talk Like a Human:

How to Better Reach the People We Need If We Want Change

California Climate & Energy Collaborative Forum
June 25, 2026

Dr. Michael Shank, Nicole Shimizu, and Emily Groth
Moderated by Jody London



Agenda

01

Welcome!

02

Talk Like a Human
Presentation

03

Exercise 1: Applying
the R.E.A.L.
Framework to Your
Work

Solo Reflection + Audience
Share Outs

04

Exercise 2: Skill
Building Talking Like
a Human

Partner Practice + Volunteer
Role Play

A woman with curly hair on the left and a man with a beard on the right are both smiling and holding brown paper coffee cups to their mouths. A thick red line starts from the woman's cup, loops around to form a heart shape in the center, and then continues to the man's cup. The background is a solid bright yellow.

**Love
Language**

BE A HUMAN

THINK LIKE A HUMAN

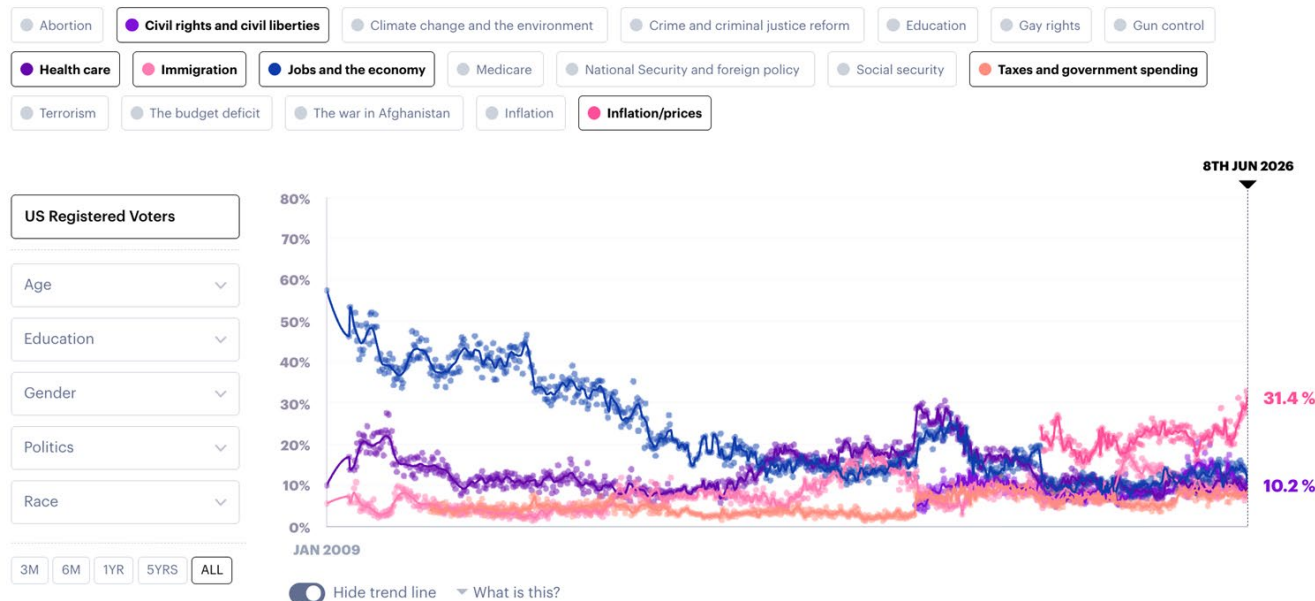


THINK

Like A Human

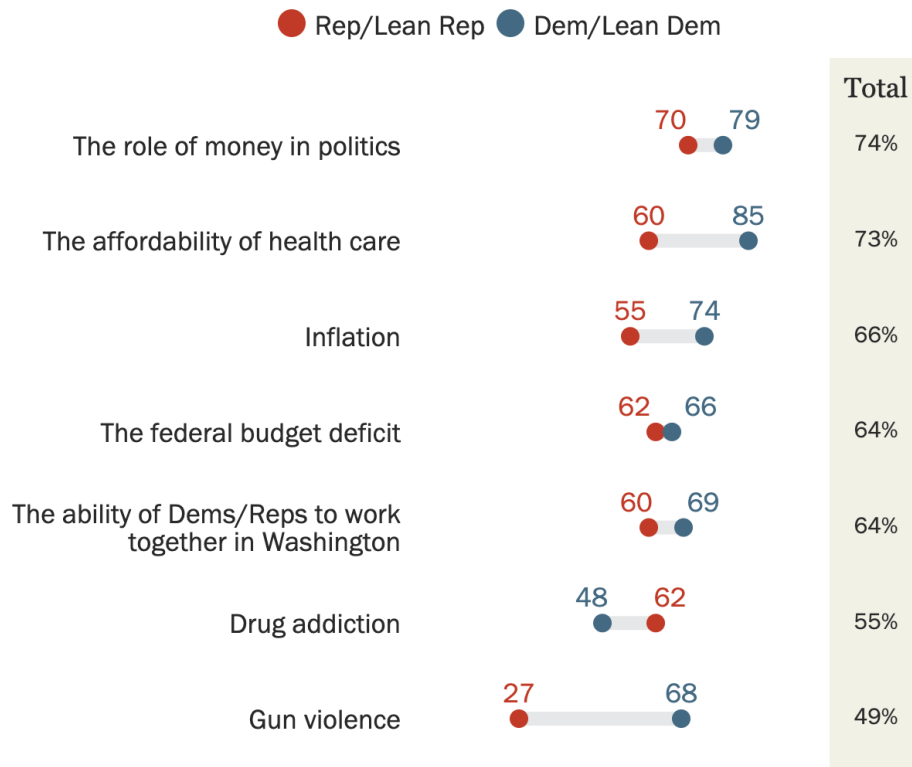
Most important issues facing the US

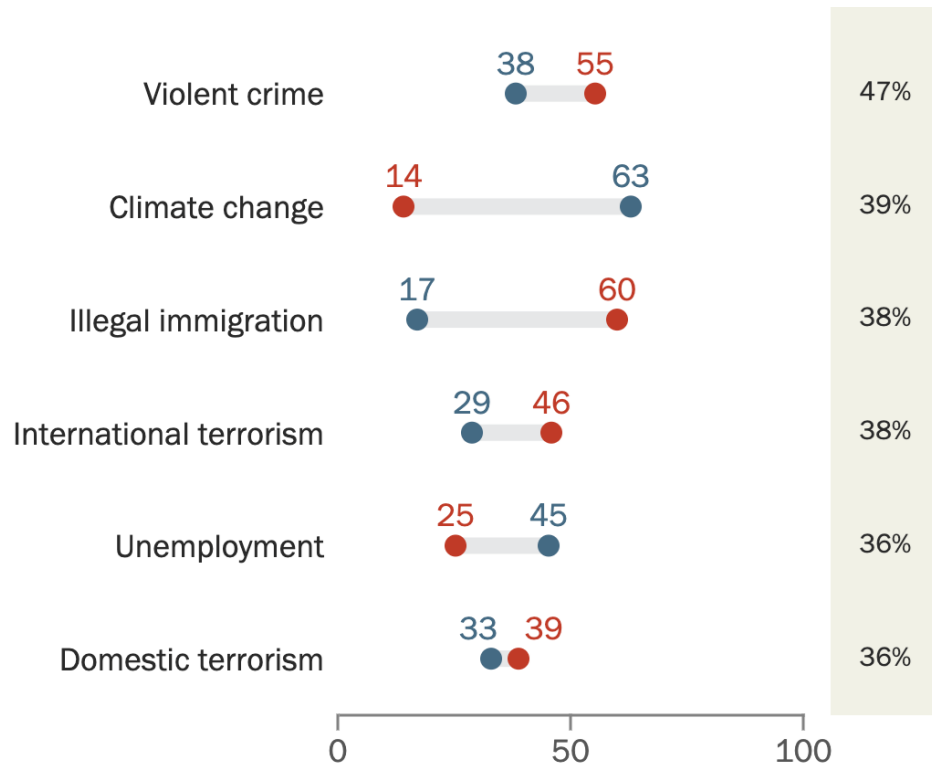
Which of these is the most important issue for you? Please note the following answer options were recoded: The environment > Climate change and the environment, Foreign policy > National security and foreign policy, The economy > Jobs and the economy, Taxes > Taxes and government spending. Starting in June 2025, the question was asked by listing all the issues. Earlier respondents were first asked how important each issue was to them, and then asked which of the issues they listed as equally important was most important to them.



Money in politics is widely viewed as a big problem for the U.S.; partisan gaps are far larger on other issues

*% who say ____ is a **very big problem** for the country today*





Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 20-26, 2026.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Chart

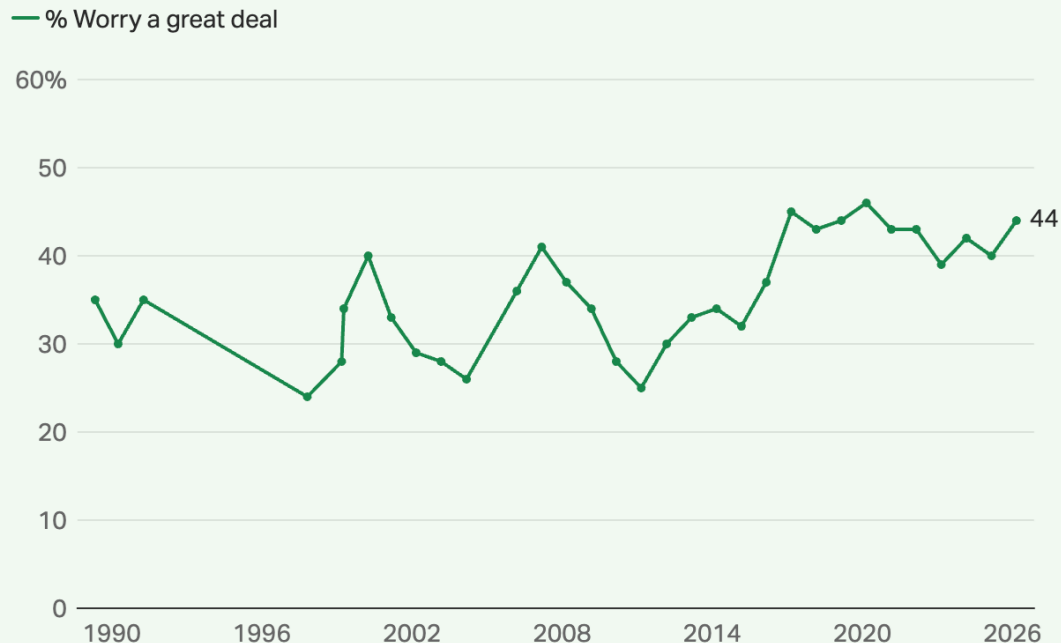
Data

Download Image

Share

Concern About Global Warming Near Its High Point

I'm going to read you a list of environmental problems. As I read each one, please tell me if you personally worry about this problem a great deal, a fair amount, only a little or not at all. How much do you personally worry about global warming or climate change?



[Get the data](#) • [Download image](#)

GALLUP®

TALK LIKE A HUMAN

Talk like a human

Lessons on how to
communicate
climate change

POTENTIAL
ENERGY



Figure 20. Language to use less of and language to use more of:

LESS OF THIS

Warming

100-year storms

Greenhouse emissions

Decarbonize

Heat wave

Extreme weather

Unseasonable / unseasonably

Natural disasters

MORE OF THIS

Overheating

Billion-dollar severe storms have increased 20-fold

Fossil fuel pollution, Carbon pollution

Reduce pollution

Dangerous heat, unsafe heat

Extreme storms, crushing heat, severe drought

Unnatural / unnaturally

Unnatural disasters



GHIRARDELLI®

PREMIUM BROWNIE MIX

DOUBLE CHOCOLATE

INCLUDES
CHOCOLATE
CHIPS



NET WT 18 OZ (1 LB 2 OZ) (510 g)

SERVING SUGGESTION
ENLARGED TO SHOW TEXTURE



GHIRARDELLI

Better Chocolate. Better Brownies.®

YOU WILL NEED: • 1/4 Cup Water • 1/3 Cup Vegetable Oil • 1 Egg



325°F

1

Preheat oven to 325°F. Prepare baking pan by lightly greasing or spraying with non-stick cooking spray.



2

Place water, oil and egg in medium bowl and stir until fully mixed. Add brownie mix and stir until well blended. Spread in prepared pan.



3

Bake as directed below. Brownies are ready to remove from oven when center is set and edges have begun to pull away from sides of pan. Cool completely in pan before cutting.

PAN SIZE	8"x 8" (Metal)	8"x 8" (Glass)	9"x 9" (Metal)
BAKE TIME	39-43 minutes	43-48 minutes	39-43 minutes

• For cake-like brownies, make batter using 2 tablespoons water, 1/3 cup vegetable oil and 2 eggs. Bake as directed.
• HIGH ALTITUDE: Add 1/4 cup all-purpose flour and an additional 2 tablespoons water.
• Do not eat raw batter.

Duo Cookie & Brownie Bars

COOKIE DOUGH:

1 package Ghirardelli Dark Chocolate Chip Cookie Mix

1 egg

1/2 cup butter, softened

BROWNIE BATTER:

1 package Ghirardelli Double Chocolate Brownie Mix

1/4 cup water

1/3 cup vegetable oil

1 egg

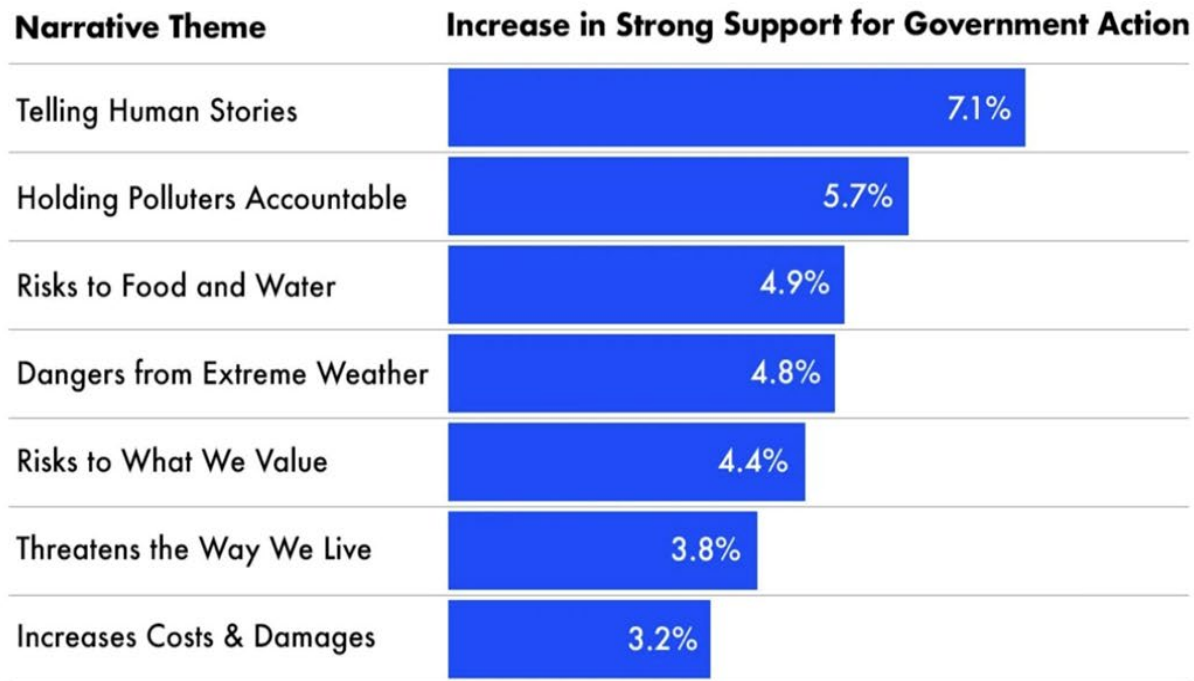
Heat oven to 325°F. Lightly grease 13"x 9" pan. In medium bowl, stir together cookie mix, egg and butter until dough forms, hand kneading if necessary; set aside. In a second bowl, stir together brownie mix, water, oil and egg until fully blended. Spread brownie batter into prepared pan. Spoon cookie dough on top of brownie batter. Bake 40-45 minutes or until cookie is golden brown. Makes 24 servings.



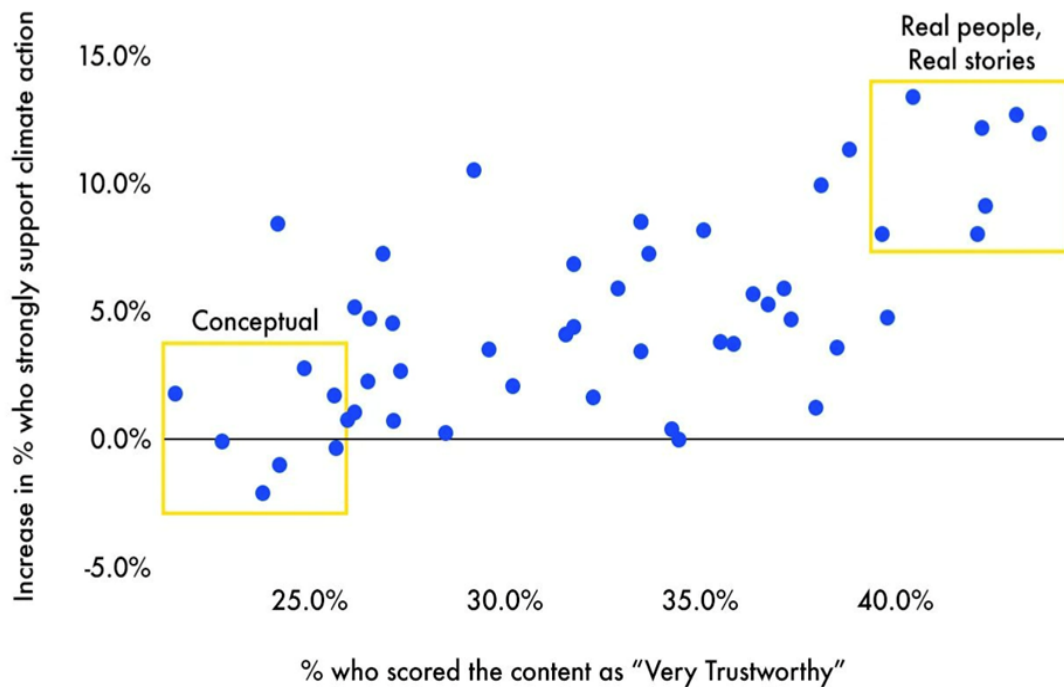
SHOW A HUMAN



Human Stories for the Win



Human protagonists consistently outperform conceptual ideas





Keep it people-focused

- Prioritize building relationships with the community members, small business owners and other partners who have benefitted from a climate or energy program in your city.
- Financial incentives and setting social norms are two powerful motivators for individual climate action. People trust their neighbors, small businesses and other real people over the government or corporations.
- Maintain a “storytellers” list to connect with media or share on social.



usdn_network · Follow



Original audio

This collaborative project has brought solar power to 10 single-family homes in Phoenix, creating lasting positive change for homeowners and their communities. Thank you to the [@cityofphoenixaz](#) and [@solarunitedneighbors](#) for helping bring this project to life.

Watch Daniel Pina's story below to see how switching to solar transformed his family's life. Stay tuned for the final installment in the series as we continue working toward a brighter future for all.



4 likes

March 20

R.E.A.L.

Real people

Everyday needs

Actualizable visions

Leverageable actions

Exercise 1: Applying the R.E.A.L. Framework to Your Work

1. Think of a program you're working on that you often need to talk about with people outside your immediate colleagues. Consider who your audience is.
2. Reflect on the R.E.A.L. framework as it relates to this program and audience for the next 5 minutes. We're looking for volunteers to share out and receive feedback after!
 - Is there a ***Real person*** who has participated in this program and may be willing to share their story?
 - What ***Everyday needs*** does this program meet for those being served (including the person identified earlier)?
 - What is the ***Actualizable vision*** that this program achieves? (i.e., What's the goal of this project? How does it align with your organization's climate action goals? Remember, talk like a human!)
 - What ***Leverageable actions*** do those interested in participating in this program need to take next?

Exercise 2: Skill Building Talking Like a Human

1. Find a partner. Partner 1 will role play as staff at their organization, and Partner 2 will role play as someone who could potentially be served by the organization's programs who has little familiarity with energy programs and the associated benefits. The partners will switch roles for each scenario.
 2. Partner 1 will begin by asking Partner 2 if they're interested in the general topic of their program. Partner 2 will respond by asking for more information. Partner 1 will "talk like a human" while describing their program. Partner 2 will respond and ask follow-up questions until they feel they understand the program.
 3. After the conversation concludes, the partner playing the person who could be served by the organization's programs will provide some feedback to the partner playing organization staff.
 - Do you feel you understand the program described enough to talk about this program with your neighbor?
 - Did organization staff use any acronyms or terms you didn't understand?
 - What was the most impactful part of organization staff's storytelling?
 - Do you have any suggestions or areas for growth?
1. Switch partner roles!

Contact us!

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