

# COLLABORATION BETWEEN UNIONS, CITIZENS, AND MUNICIPALITIES: TOWARDS A COMMON NARRATIVE

Cornell University

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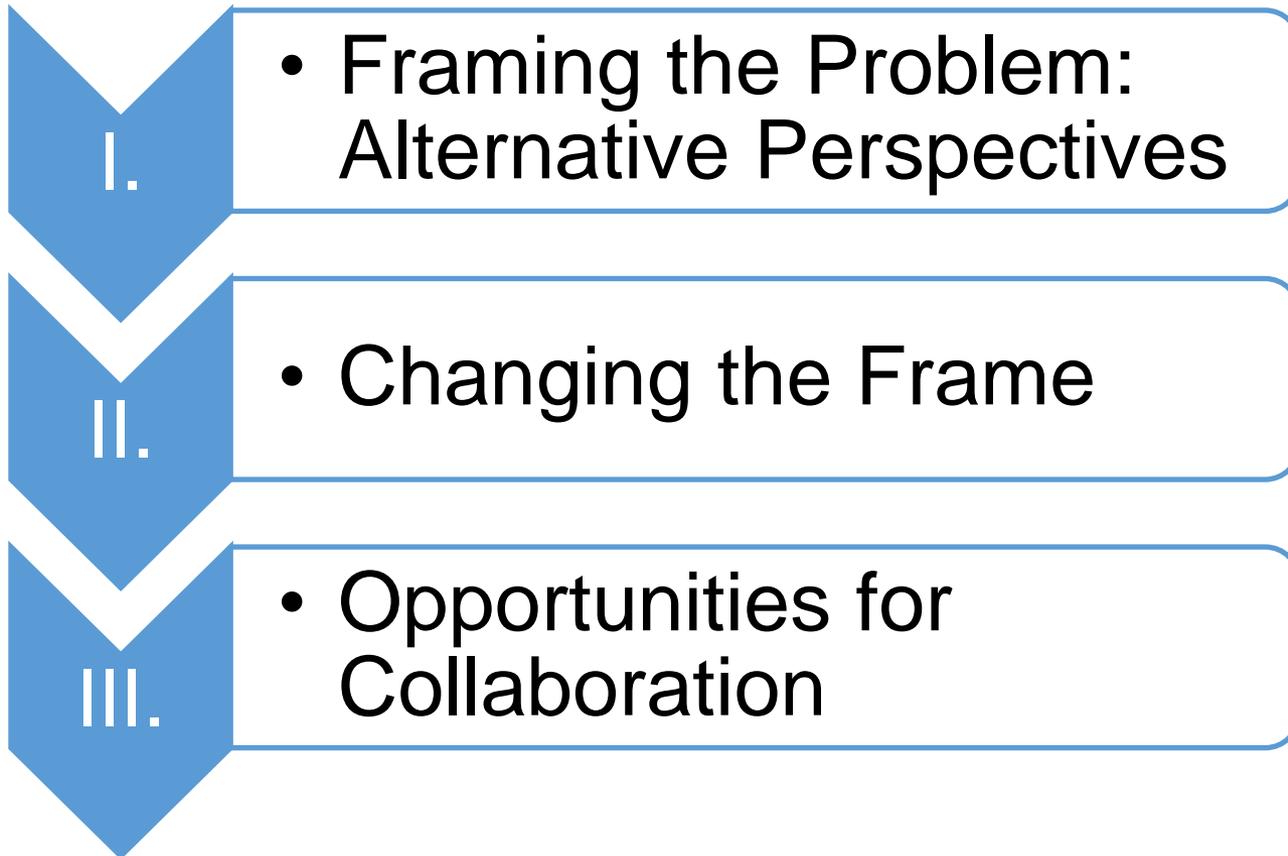
Zachary Cunningham

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December 9, 2014 at Gideon Putnam Resort, Saratoga Springs, NY

Visit [www.mildredwarner.org/restructuring/fiscal-stress](http://www.mildredwarner.org/restructuring/fiscal-stress) &  
[www.cardi.cornell.edu](http://www.cardi.cornell.edu) for more information.

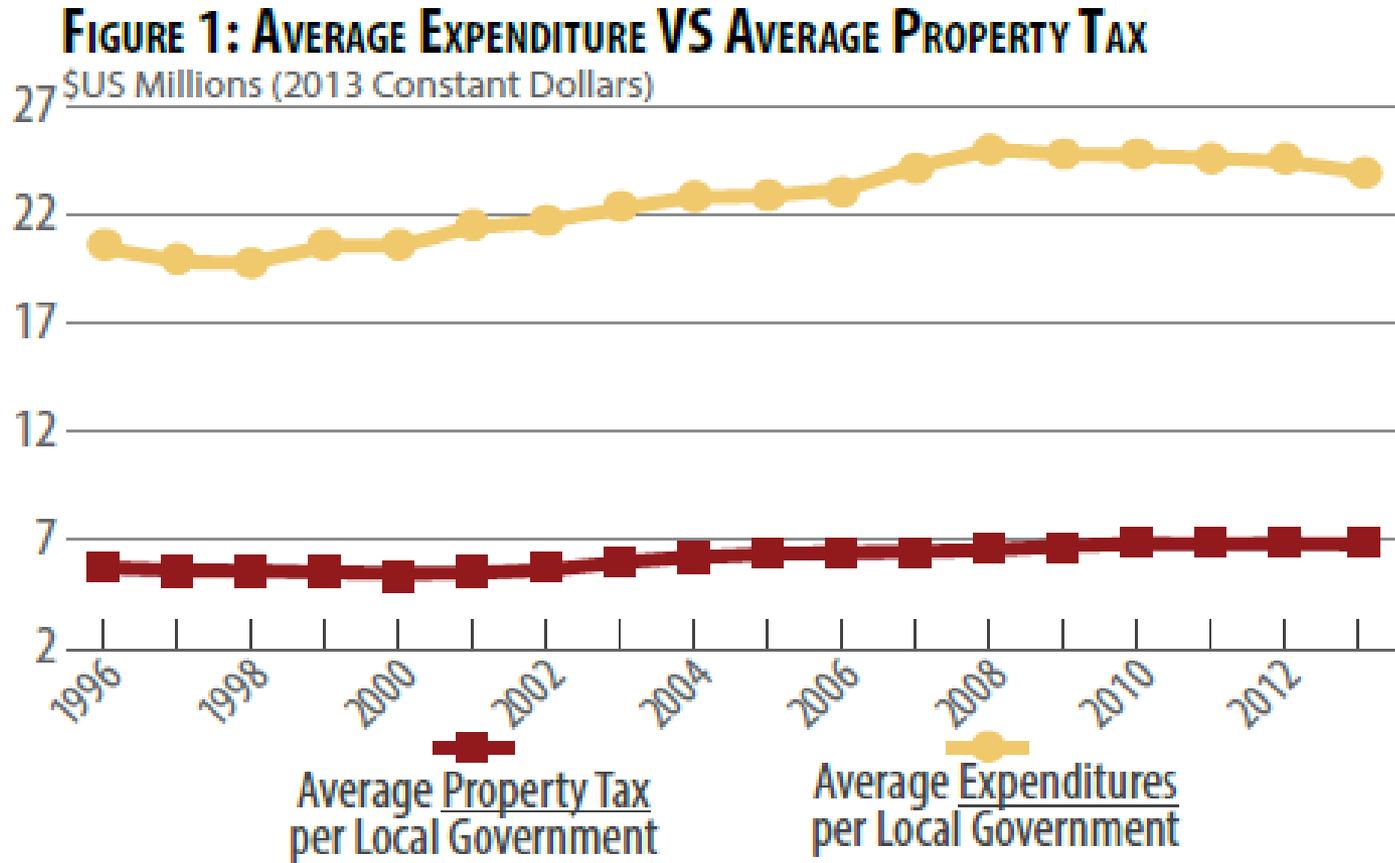


<http://youtu.be/y-CRuYH1k-Q>

# LOCAL LEVEL PERSPECTIVES



In real terms, tax expenditures and property taxes were **flat or falling** even before the tax cap was enacted.



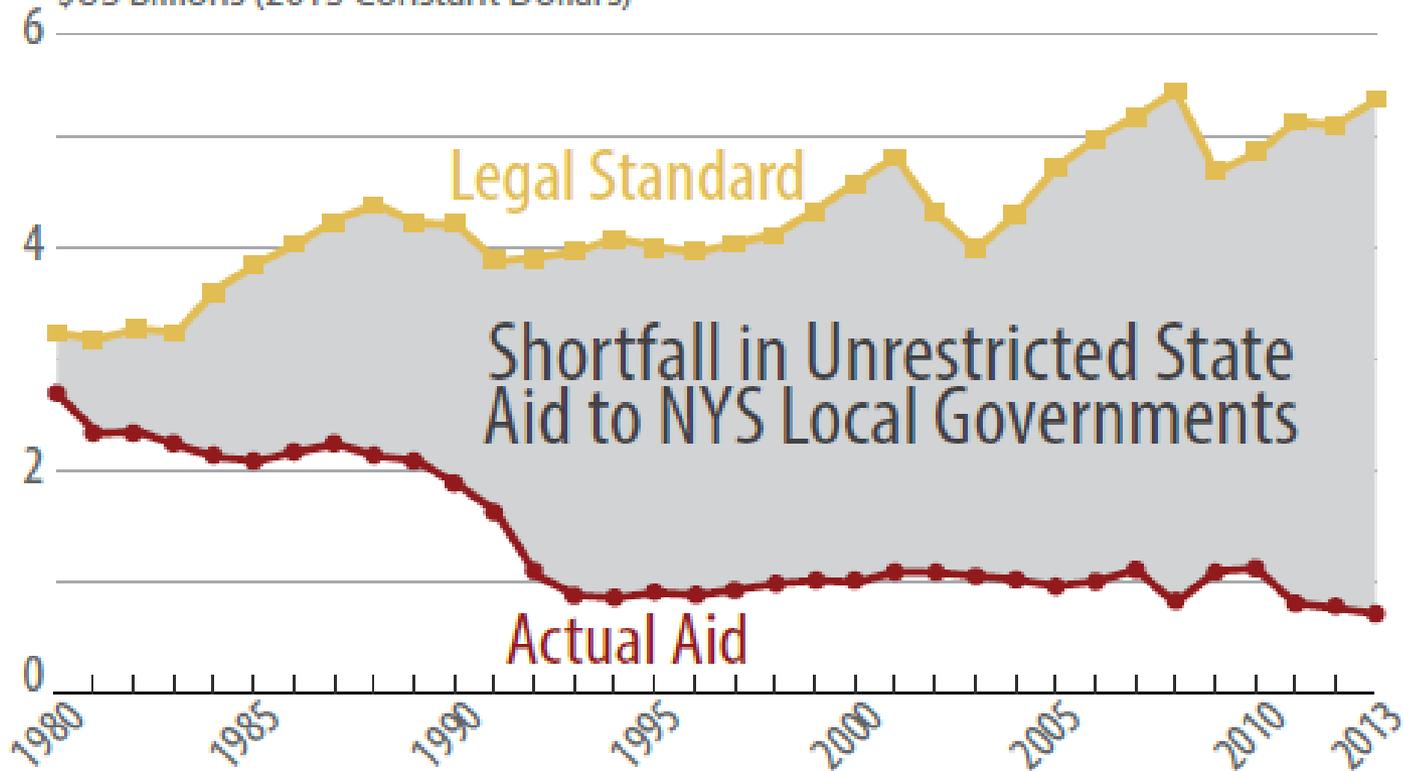
Data Source: Local Government Data, New York Office of the State Comptroller, 1996-2013

# LOCAL LEVEL PERSPECTIVES

Unrestricted State Aid to municipalities has fallen by **75%** in inflation-adjusted dollars over the last 30 years.

**FIGURE 2: "STANDARD" VS. ACTUAL UNRESTRICTED STATE AID 1980-2013**

\$US Billions (2013 Constant Dollars)



Data Source: Adapted from the Fiscal Policy Institute

- It can be hard to get citizen support on these issues because they are complex and anti-tax attitudes persist
- Research from FrameWorks Institute and Demos can help to frame the narrative in a way that will connect with citizens



Data Sources: Demos and Frameworks Institute



Draw explicit links between  
budgets and taxes

- “Investment Trap”
- Shift from individual action to collective responsibility

Data Sources: Demos and Frameworks Institute



Never repeat a negative frame

- Repeating something negative reinforces it
- Replace with a new narrative
- Ex: St. Paul Federation of Teachers

Data Sources: Demos and Frameworks Institute



Use metaphors to bridge gaps

- Help simplify complex concepts
- However, metaphor must match the situation
  - Ex: Household budget metaphor



Data Sources: Demos and Frameworks Institute

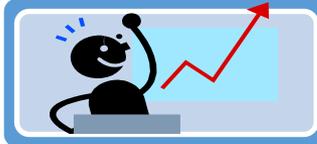


## Use a “Can-Do” belief system

- “Sympathy for the poor” makes people feel problems are impossible to solve
- Make citizens feel connected to the solution, emphasizes collection action
- Ex: Ithaca trash tags

# CHANGING THE FRAME

Data Sources: Demos and Frameworks Institute



Always interpret data;  
don't just present it

- Narrative connects more with people than just facts or numbers
- Cuomo does this in his campaign video

# CHANGING THE FRAME

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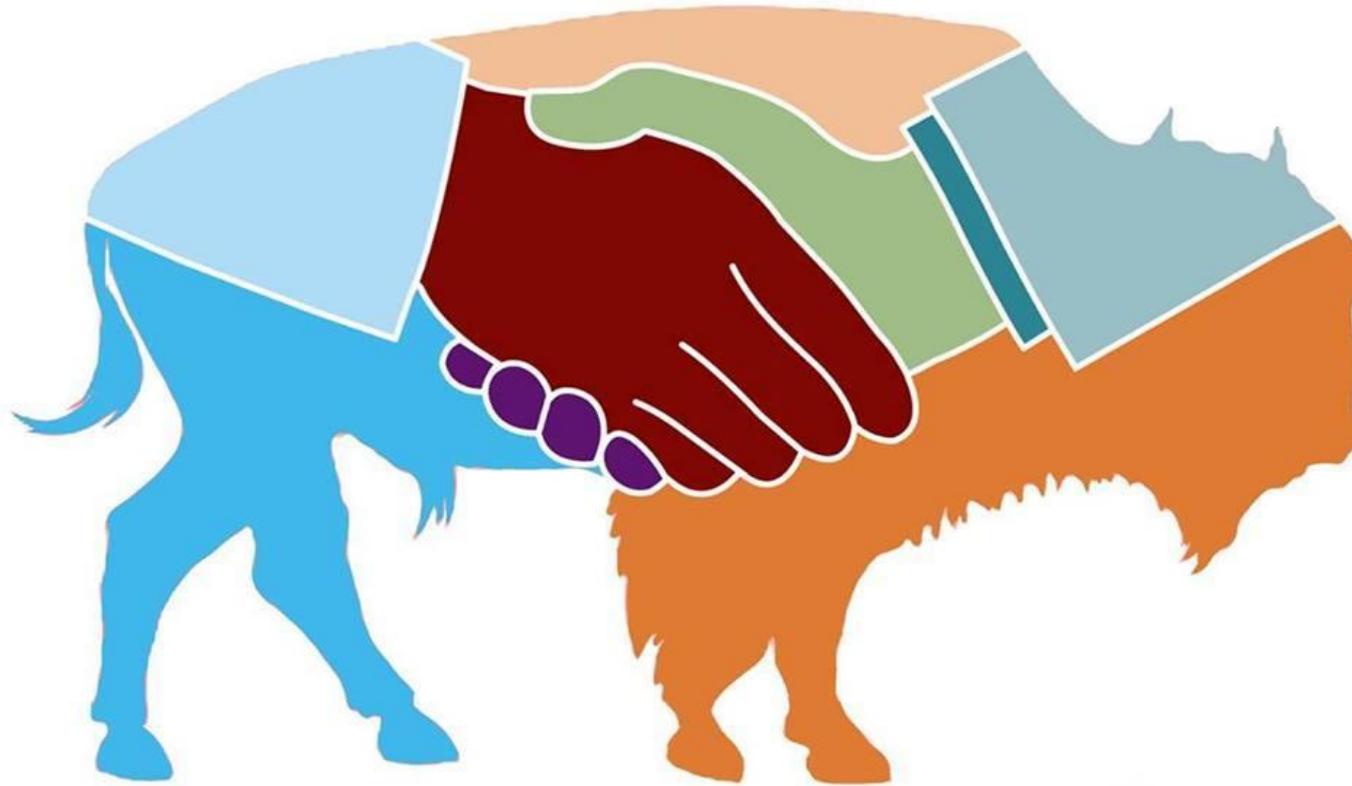
Interviews with local government organizations, labor union officials, and civil society groups pointed to common goals:

- More exemptions to the Property Tax Cap
- Increase Infrastructure Spending
- Increase State Aid to Municipalities

## Rochester

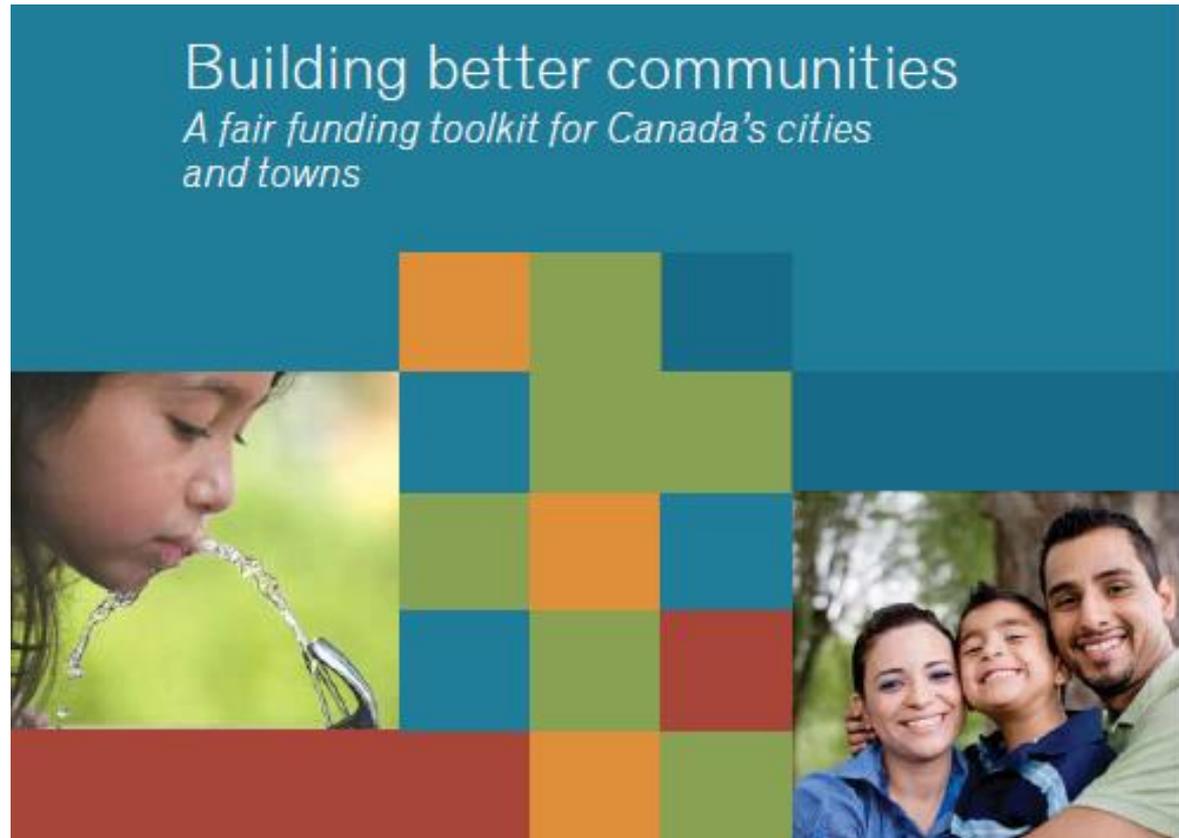


# SUCCESSFUL EXAMPLES



**Open Buffalo**

## Canadian Union of Public Employees



- Elements of an alternate frame in NYS
- Common ground between unions, municipalities, and citizens
- Possibilities for collaboration

For the full report, visit

[www.mildredwarner.org/restructuring/fiscal-stress](http://www.mildredwarner.org/restructuring/fiscal-stress)