Four Approaches to Equity: The Good, the Bad, and the Fruitless

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Frameworks for Promoting Equity in Organizations

Frame 1
Support the URG

Frame 2
Create Equal Opportunity

Frame 3
Value Differences

Frame 4
Change Engineering Culture

Minimize differences in experience between URGs and the majority so that URGs can compete as equals.

Focus is on the individual.

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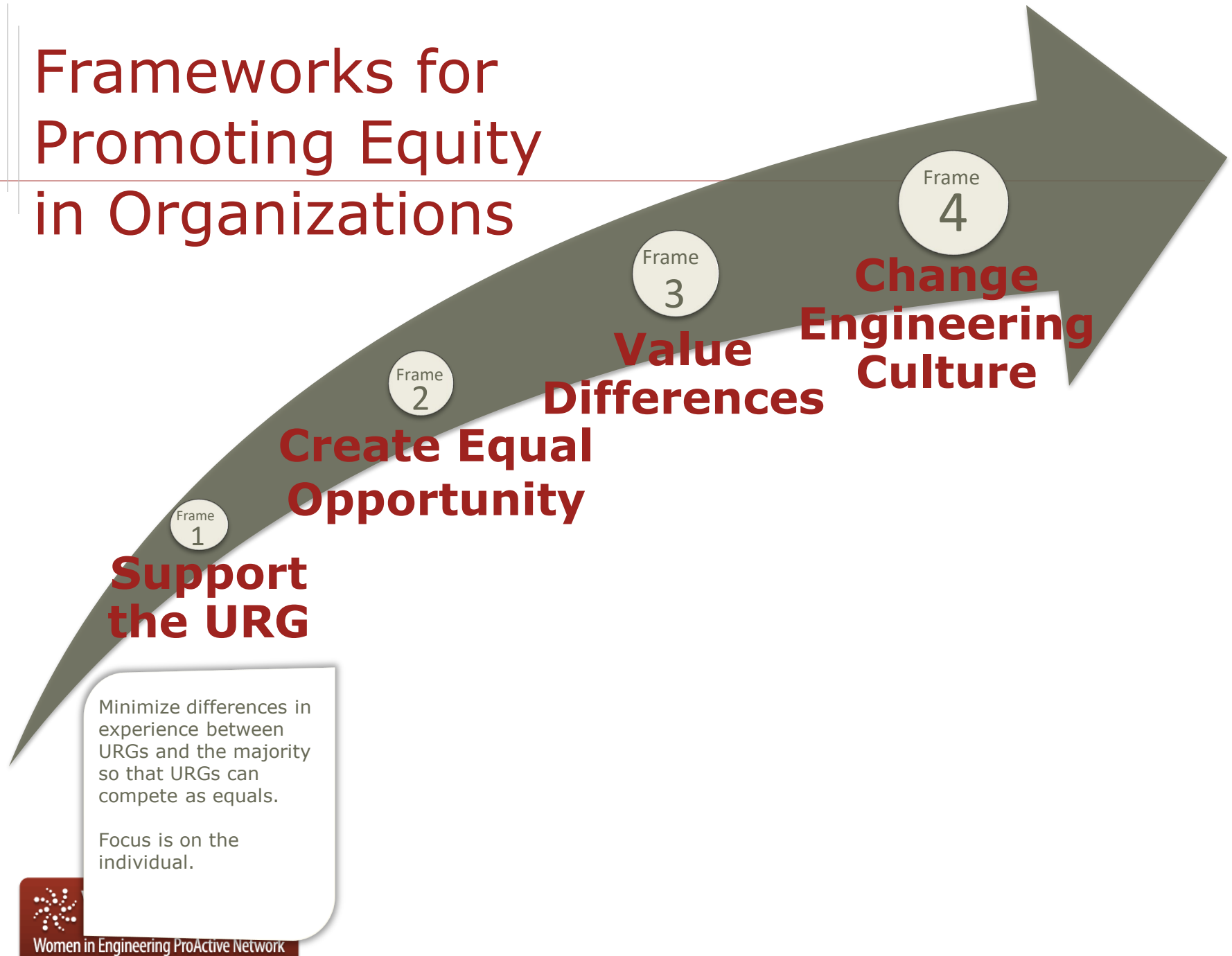
Support the Under-represented Groups

Difference Assumption:

- Groups are socialized differently. This results in deficiencies in the URG relative to the majority, therefore we need to help the URG members with something that the majority group does not have issues with.

Examples of Activities:

- Mentoring programs for African Americans
- Affinity groups
- Leadership development programs for women

Support the Under-represented Groups
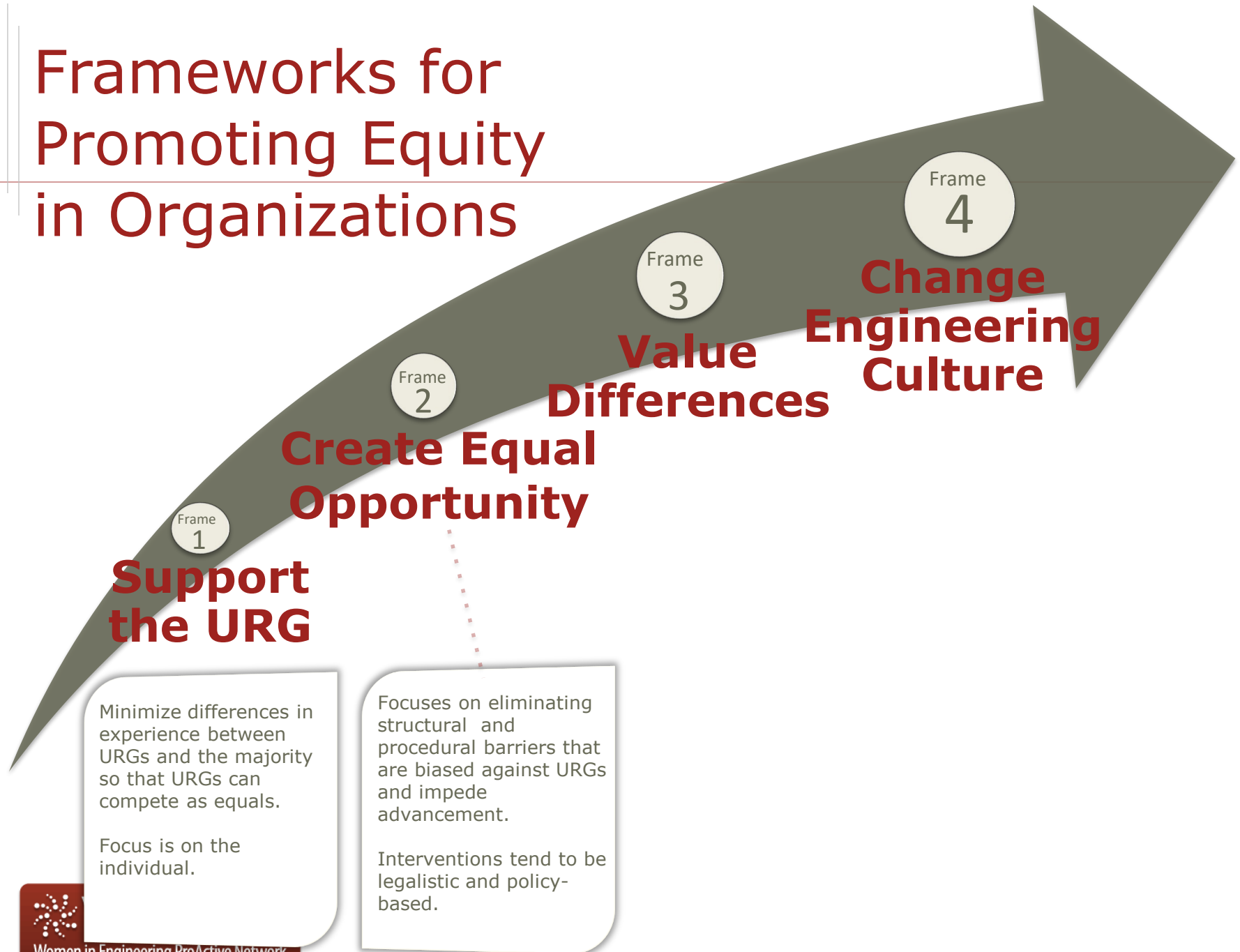
Positives:

- Programs can help individuals succeed

- Programs can develop role models for others

- Programs can bring together members of a URG, which can lead to an empowering and supportive environment

Support the Under-represented Groups

Negatives:

- Deficiency model thinking
- Lack of success is attributed to the individual
- Universalizes individuals' experiences
- Does nothing to change the system, structures, and organizations that make equity more difficult for some groups

Frameworks for Promoting Equity in Organizations

Frame
1

Frame
2

Frame
3

Frame
4

Support the URG

Create Equal Opportunity

Value Differences

Change Engineering Culture

Minimize differences in experience between URGs and the majority so that URGs can compete as equals.

Focus is on the individual.

Focuses on eliminating structural and procedural barriers that are biased against URGs and impede advancement.

Interventions tend to be legalistic and policy-based.

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Create Equal Opportunity

Difference Assumption:

- Groups are more similar than different.
- Underrepresentation is caused by differences in access that lead to advancement, therefore we need to reduce or eliminate structural barriers.

Examples of Activities:

- Affirmative Action
- "Stop the Tenure Clock"
- Policy-based practices that are "exceptions" to the general rule.

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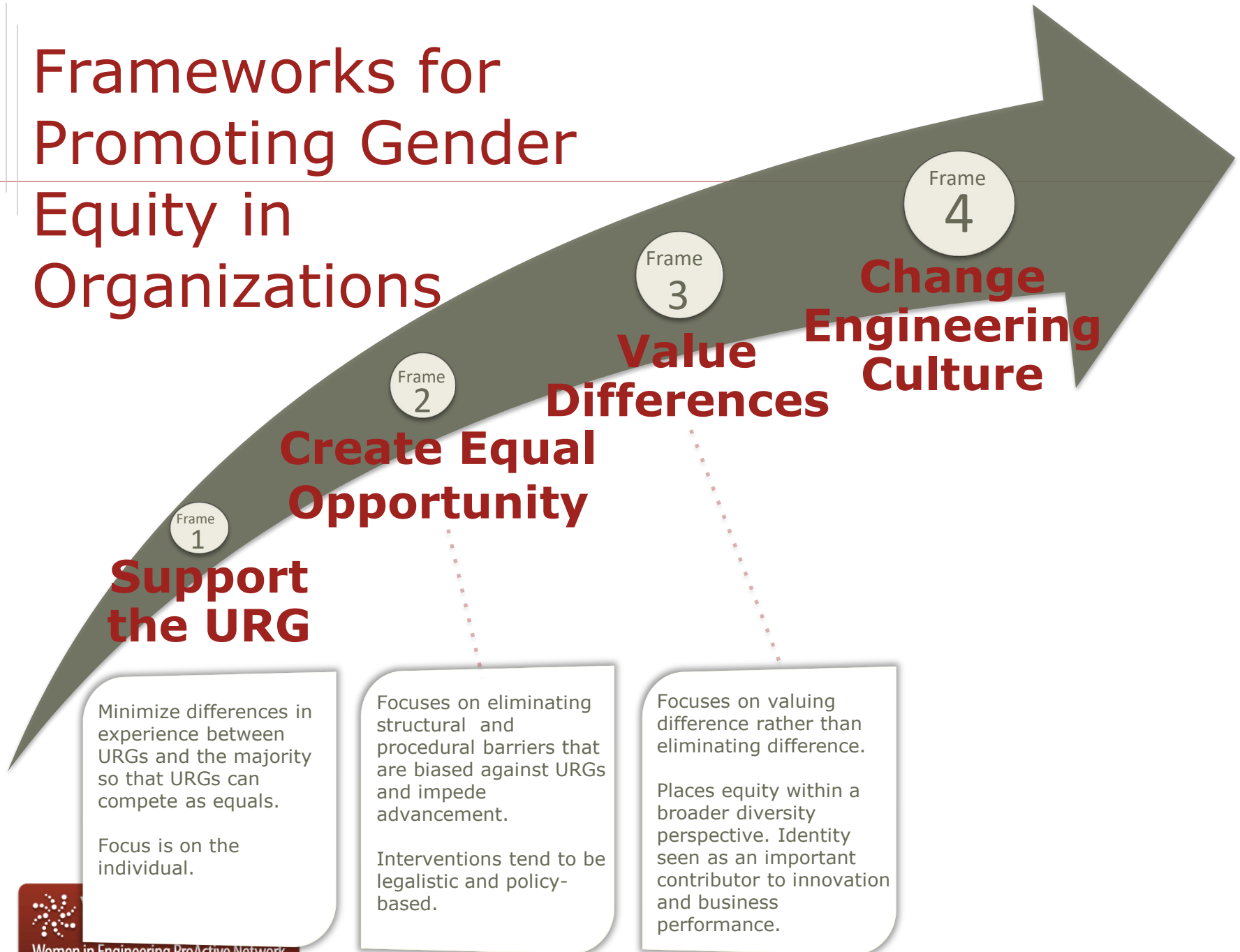
Create Equal Opportunity

Positives:

- Programs can help with recruiting, retaining, and advancing members of URGs

Create Equal Opportunity

Negatives:

- Do not, by themselves, change the culture of the organization.

- Do not recognize aspects of the organization that produce discrimination and bias in favor of some and against others.

- Can cause "backlash" against those who take advantage of such policies, creating an additional source of discrimination.

Frameworks for Promoting Gender Equity in Organizations

Frame 1

Support the URG

Minimize differences in experience between URGs and the majority so that URGs can compete as equals.

Focus is on the individual.

Frame 2

Create Equal Opportunity

Focuses on eliminating structural and procedural barriers that are biased against URGs and impede advancement.

Interventions tend to be legalistic and policy-based.

Frame 3

Value Differences

Focuses on valuing difference rather than eliminating difference.

Places equity within a broader diversity perspective. Identity seen as an important contributor to innovation and business performance.

Frame 4

Change Engineering Culture

Value Differences

Difference Assumption:

- Groups are more different than similar.

- We need to recognize, affirm, and value these differences.

Examples of Activities:

- Education programs to promote tolerance and understanding of different groups.

- Promoting and leveraging skills and qualities of one URG for organizational benefit.
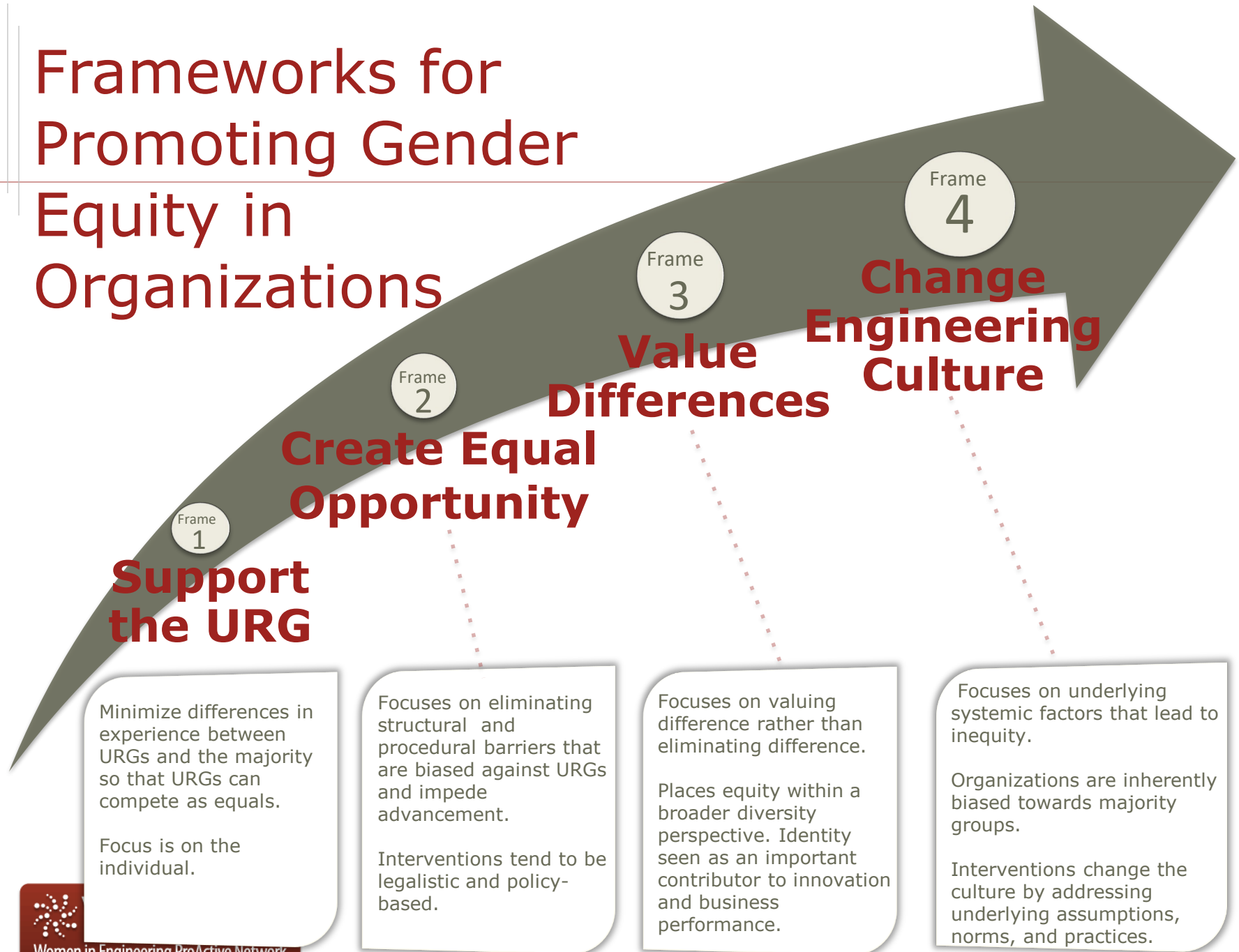
Value Differences

Positives:

- Differences between groups are recognized
- Some differences may become more valued in practice
- This framework starts to bring majority folks into diversity and inclusion conversations

Value Differences

Negatives:

- Universalizes the experiences and characteristics of members of underrepresented groups and majority groups.

- Can reinforce the very stereotypes that exacerbate exclusion, and can reiterate hierarchies through emphasizing difference.

Frameworks for Promoting Gender Equity in Organizations

Frame 1 — Support the URG

Minimize differences in experience between URGs and the majority so that URGs can compete as equals.

Focus is on the individual.

Frame 2 — Create Equal Opportunity

Focuses on eliminating structural and procedural barriers that are biased against URGs and impede advancement.

Interventions tend to be legalistic and policy-based.

Frame 3 — Value Differences

Focuses on valuing difference rather than eliminating difference.

Places equity within a broader diversity perspective. Identity seen as an important contributor to innovation and business performance.

Frame 4 — Change Engineering Culture

Focuses on underlying systemic factors that lead to inequity.

Organizations are inherently biased towards majority groups.

Interventions change the culture by addressing underlying assumptions, norms, and practices.

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Change the Culture

Difference Assumption:

- While there may be differences between groups, the cause of some groups' underrepresentation is that organizations' cultures are set up to produce the outcomes that exist – i.e. that it's easier for some to succeed than others.

- To promote equity, we must question our organization's culture – it's structures and policies, beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions – and how that culture affects groups and individuals differently

Change the Culture

The "normativity" of culture is what prevents most participants from seeing its discriminatory nature; it appears to be a meritocracy even as it works to uphold inequity.
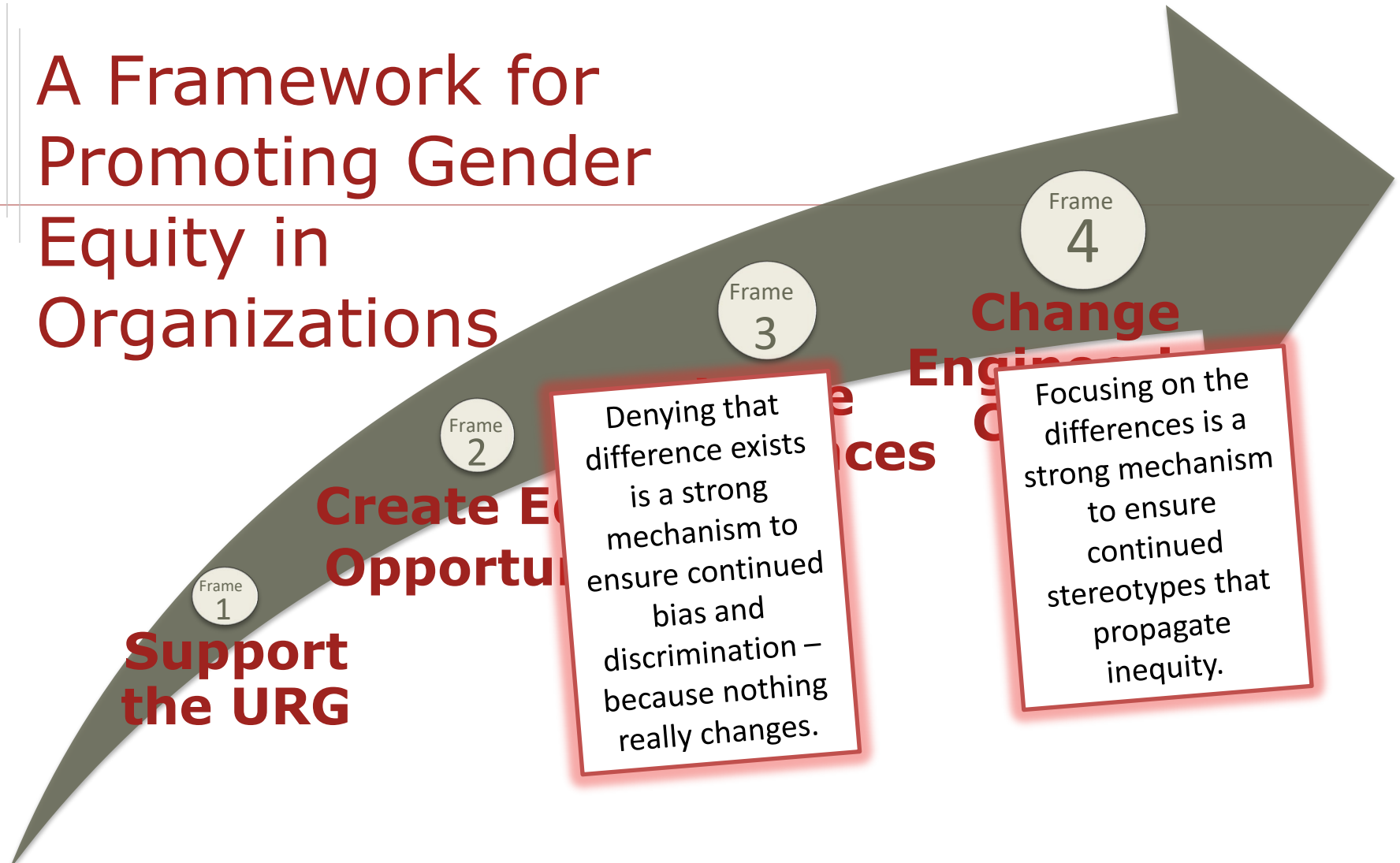
Change the Culture

Positives:

- This is the only framework that can produce sustainable outcomes that promote equity.

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Change the Culture

Negatives:

- This is extremely difficult to do

- Resistance to change is deep – especially changes to belief and value systems

- Changes that are created can be difficult to sustain long enough to become "normal"

- This can be very resource-intensive

A Framework for Promoting Gender Equity in Organizations

Frame 1

Frame 2

Frame 3

Frame 4

Support the URG

Create Equal Opportunities

Value Differences

Change Engineered Culture

Denying that difference exists is a strong mechanism to ensure continued bias and discrimination – because nothing really changes.

Focusing on the differences is a strong mechanism to ensure continued stereotypes that propagate inequity.

| Difference doesn't work. Minimize it! | Difference is; tolerate it. Work it into the system. | Difference is good; reinforce it. | Differences are what make us better. |

"It is possible to oppress people both by ignoring their differences and by denying their sameness." – Martha Minow

Source: Minow, M. (1984). Learning to Live with the Dilemma of Difference: Bilingual and Special Education. *Law and Contemporary Problems*, 48(2), 157 – 211.

A Path Forward

- Frame 1 to empower and support members of underrepresented groups.

- Frame 2 to stop-gap obvious pain points.

- Frame 3 to think about our differences as strengths.

- All of these activities are needed until there is a Frame 4 approach to create organizations and cultures that work for ALL – à la Universal Design thinking.

Let's talk!