

---

# We're all in this together.

Suggestions for Effective Sea-Level Rise  
Communication in Miami-Dade

Fall 2016

The  
Miami  
Foundation  
For A Greater Miami

---

Sea levels are rising. For cities like Miami, the effects are both physical and psychological. And the solutions will require new applications of imagination, ingenuity, and a willingness to cooperate on a whole new level.

*We're all in this together.*

The good news is we're on it. Every day politicians, engineers, academics and non-profits are moving solutions forward. Now, we need to educate and engage the citizen body to generate the political will necessary to turn big plans into active projects.

Mobilizing the various and diverse communities in Miami Dade around this issue will require skillful communication. To this end, The Miami Foundation commissioned a study in the summer of 2016 to uncover core communication challenges on the topic, and identify leverage points with key audiences: business leaders, Millennials, front line communities, political influencers, and the economically vulnerable.

What we learned may help you in your efforts to raise this issue to the place of prominence that it deserves—in our daily lives, as Miamians.

# Top 5 TakeAways

---

## 1. We still have an awareness issue.

Many people in Miami don't understand the complexity or scale of the SLR problem. Some due to language barriers; some due to denial or fear; some due to their focus on more pressing needs.

## 2. We need "the opposite of panic."

People agree that it's unwise to wait to act until disaster strikes. Coordinated communication on what actions are being taken and what is still necessary could improve confidence and increase engagement.

## 3. Skepticism inhibits action.

Skepticism about the capacity of city/county officials to prioritize this and handle it is high. Economically-vulnerable communities especially, feel disconnected from decision-making. And many feel powerless in the face of entrenched commercial and political interests.

## 4. Seeing this as an opportunity is motivating.

The idea of taking this as an opportunity to embrace change and become a model "City of the Future" was a popular and motivating meme. Innovation and imagination can thrive in the face of the crisis. The business community, especially appreciated this call-to-action.

## 5. Water is the problem and the solution.

Protecting the water supply was the policy action of highest priority—something for all to rally around. Water unites Miamians and is a great democratizer. The answer lies in "living with water" in new ways.

# Top 5 Communication Recommendations

---

## 1. Less doom and gloom.

Tell people what's happening and what they can do about it. A good rule of thumb for messaging is 1/3 "fear" for urgency + 2/3 "hope" to motivate and empower.

## 2. Have frequent, genuine conversations.

Public meetings, town halls, collaborative decision-making technologies, social media...the more transparent, open, and two-way the conversation, the better. We need unlikely advocates and more inclusive forums to reach more people quickly.

## 3. Clear leadership and accountability.


Who is doing what? What has been done? What are other cities doing? Who can step up and take charge? People are looking for fearless leadership and trustworthy sources. This must not get mired in political angling and partisanship. We must demonstrate a willingness to rise above pettiness.

## 4. Engage artists, activists, youth and elders.

Storytelling, art, and self-expression are critical to engaging the public. Hack-A-Thons, public performance, and other creative means of communication are essential to educating and including the whole community effectively. Call on citizens to help solve this!

## 5. Need a real vision and plan of action.

Where are we headed? The clearer the long-term vision for the city, the more courage and conviction we will see in personal and professional decisions about staying, investing, building a city of the future...

A stylized illustration of a city with a river, bridges, and buildings. The scene is depicted in a hand-drawn, graphic style with bold outlines and a limited color palette of blues, greens, browns, and greys. A central river flows through the city, crossed by several bridges. On the left, there are multi-story buildings with windows. On the right, there are palm trees and circular decorative elements. A small red boat is on the river in the upper right, and a larger green boat is in the lower center. The entire scene is framed by a white border.

—  
We need a clear vision for the future of Miami; a coordinated plan for getting there; and effective dialogue that brings the community along and keeps everyone engaged.

# Interviews With Community Leaders

---

“The opportunity here is for Miami to be a think tank and experimental ground that can help other cities facing the same thing. This is a service to future generations.”

– *Caroline Lewis, CLEO Institute*

“The economic impact for communities is the next big aspect of this story. This will affect everyone.”

– *Javier Soto, The Miami Foundation*

“This is an actual business opportunity if approached the right way.”

– *Jack Lowell, Colliers International*

“Those of us who are doubling down on what we’re putting into this city...People think we’re sort of crazy.”

– *Rebecca Monson, The New Tropic*

---

# WHO WE SPOKE TO FOR THE RESEARCH...

We conducted mini-interviews and 3-hour embodied research groups with each of the following constituent groups. Each group was comprised of 15-18 hand-selected influencers in our community.

## BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Business leaders: real estate, hospitality, finance

## FRONTLINES

People who live on the geographic frontline

## ECONOMICALLY VULNERABLE

Community organizers from low income neighborhoods

## POLITICAL INFLUENCERS

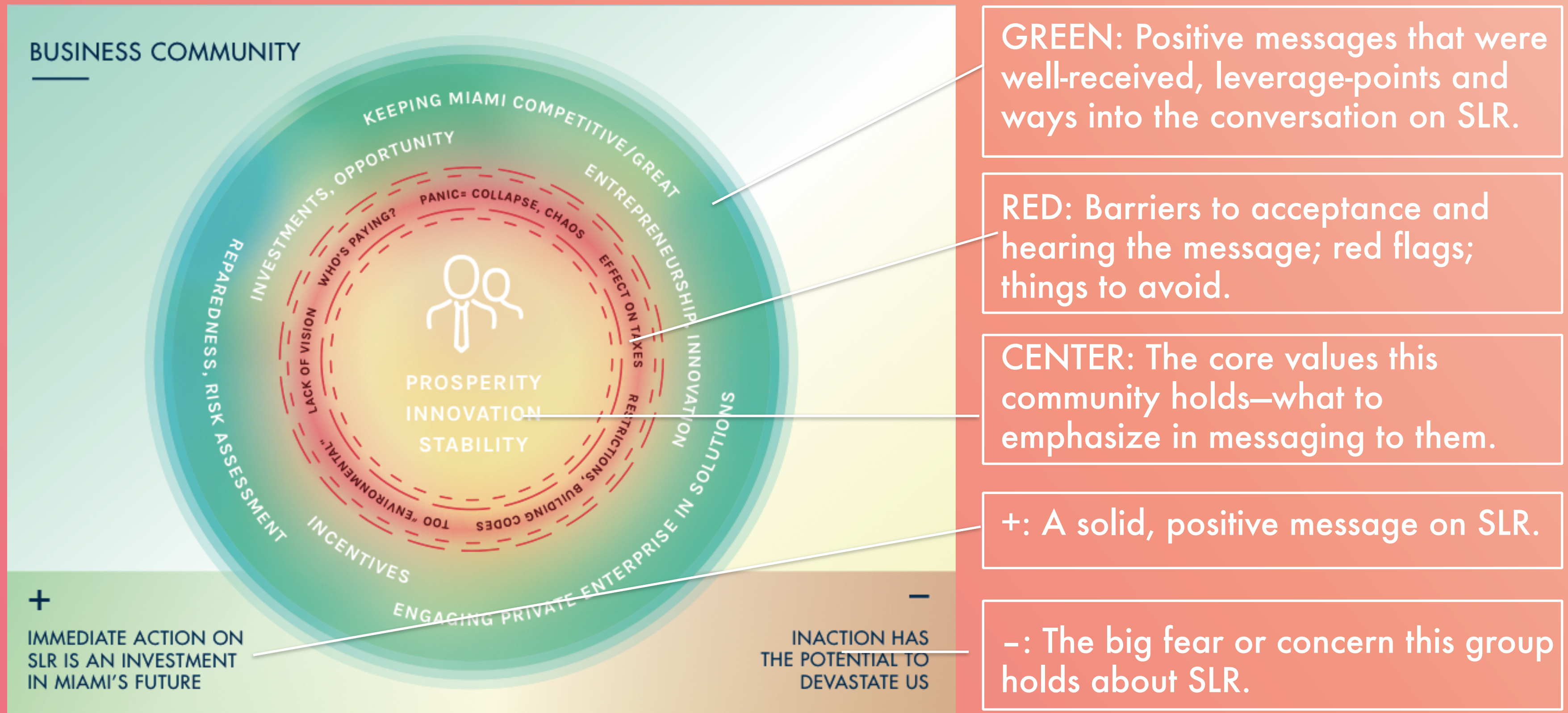
Community leaders who influence blocks of people

## MILLENNIALS

20-34 year-old engaged Miamians

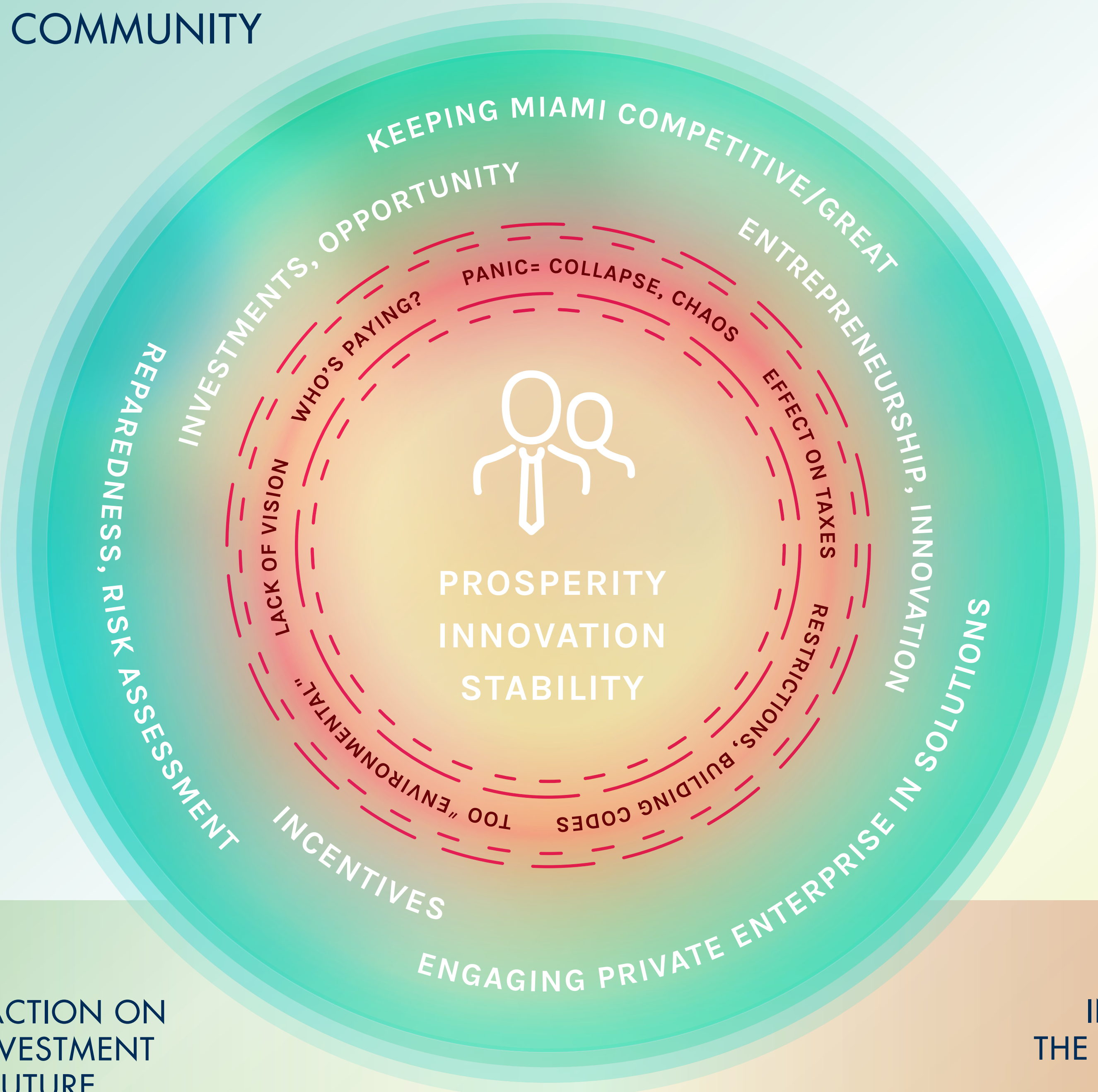
# COMMUNICATION PROMPT KEY

On the following pages we've put together a "prompt" for communicating to each of these audiences. All findings and phrasing came from the embodied research groups we conducted.





# BUSINESS COMMUNITY

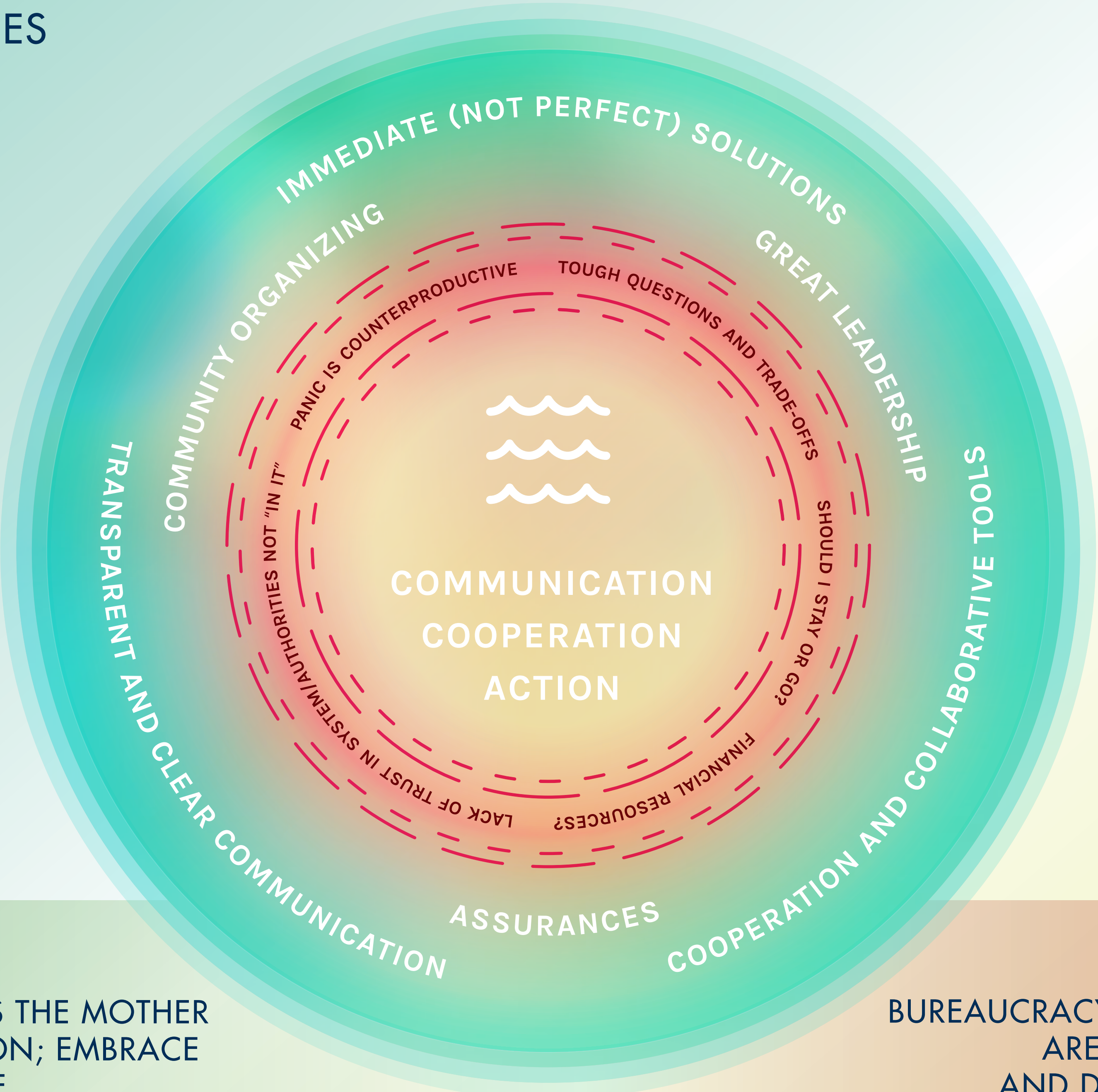


IMMEDIATE ACTION ON SLR IS AN INVESTMENT IN MIAMI'S FUTURE



INACTION HAS THE POTENTIAL TO DEVASTATE US

# FRONTLINES

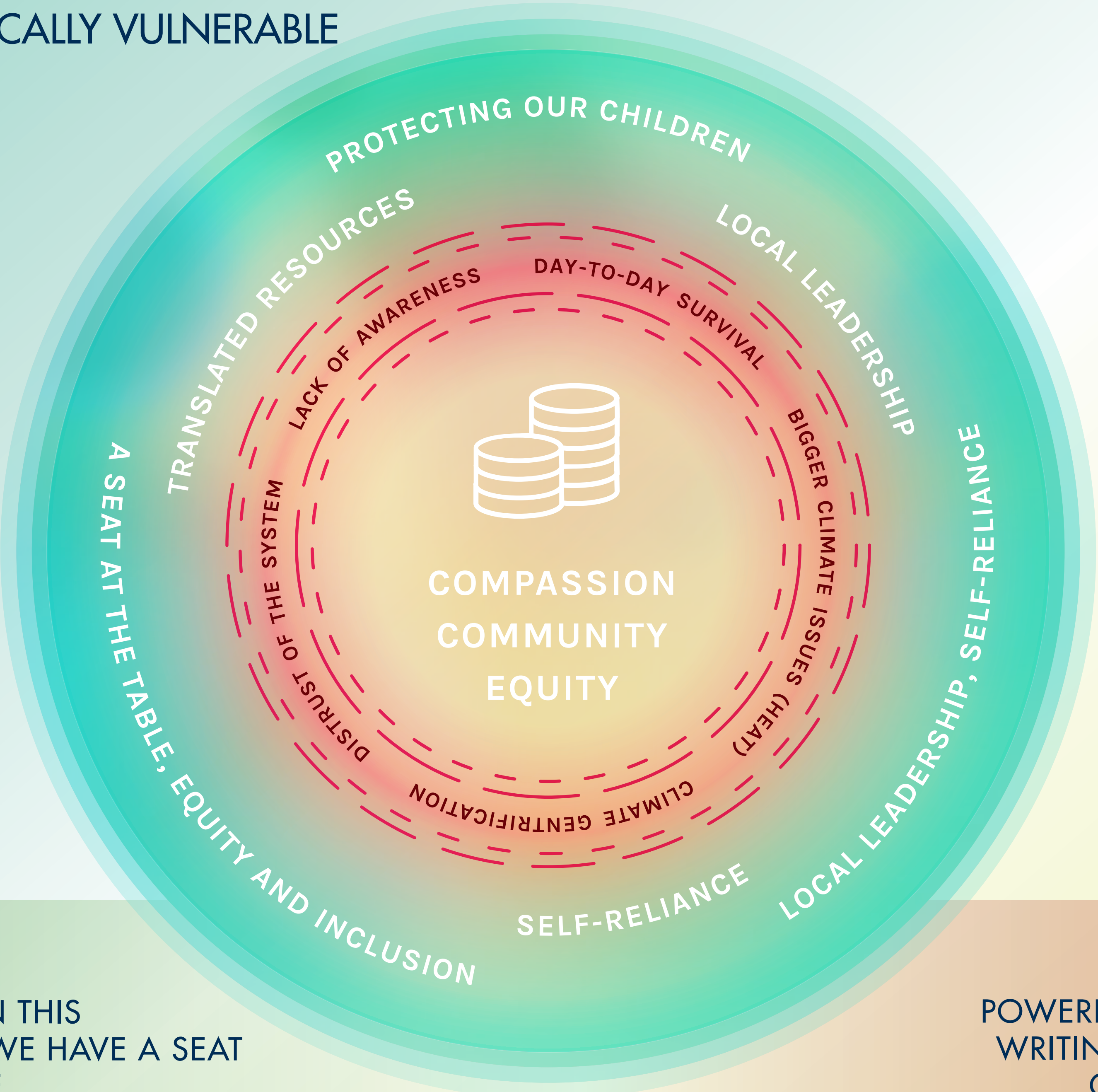


NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION; EMBRACE THE CHANGE



BUREAUCRACY AND DENIAL ARE FRUSTRATING AND DEMORALIZING

# ECONOMICALLY VULNERABLE

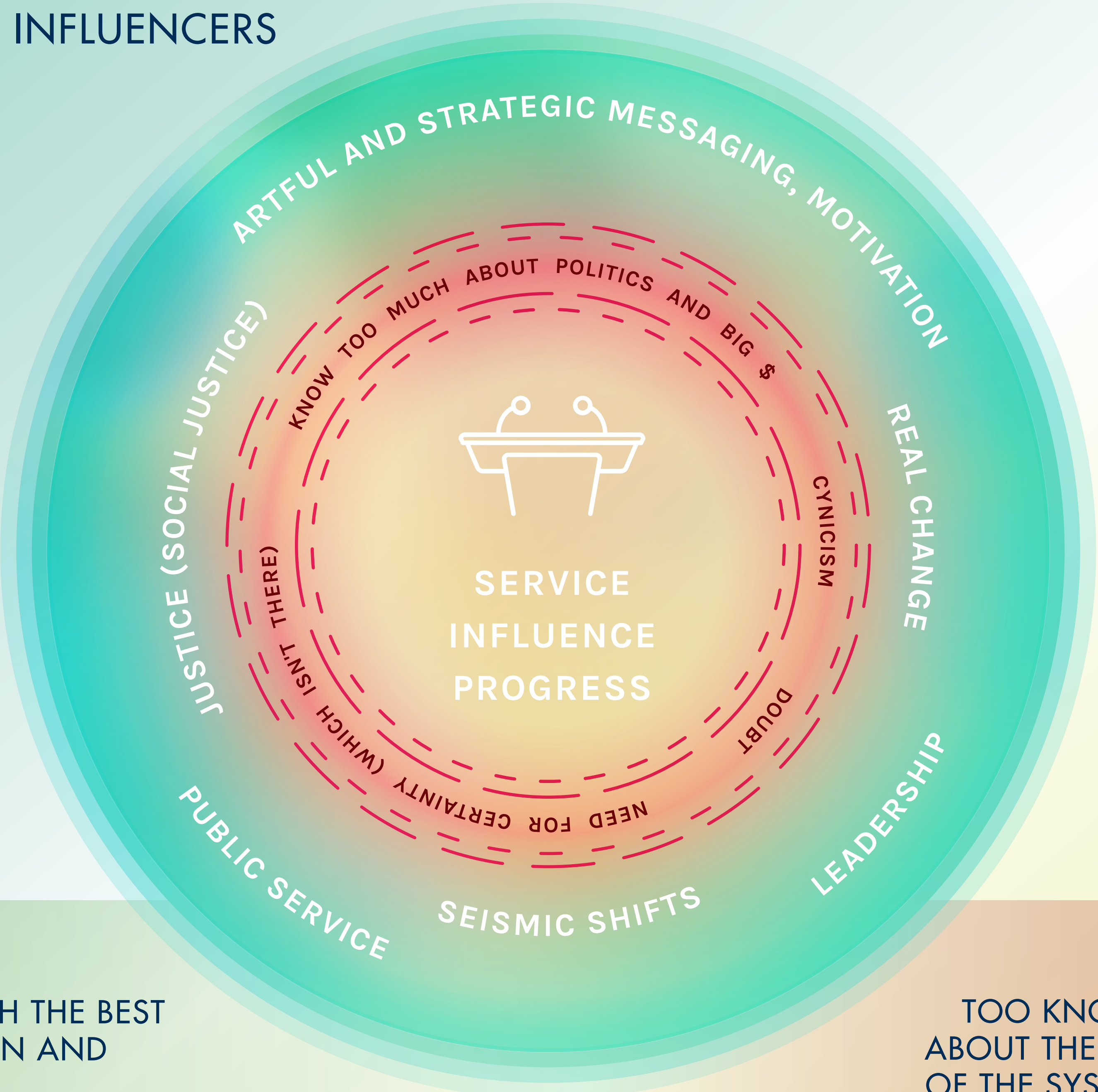


WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER; WE HAVE A SEAT AT THE TABLE



POWERLESSNESS THE, WRITING IS ALREADY ON THE WALLS

# POLITICAL INFLUENCERS

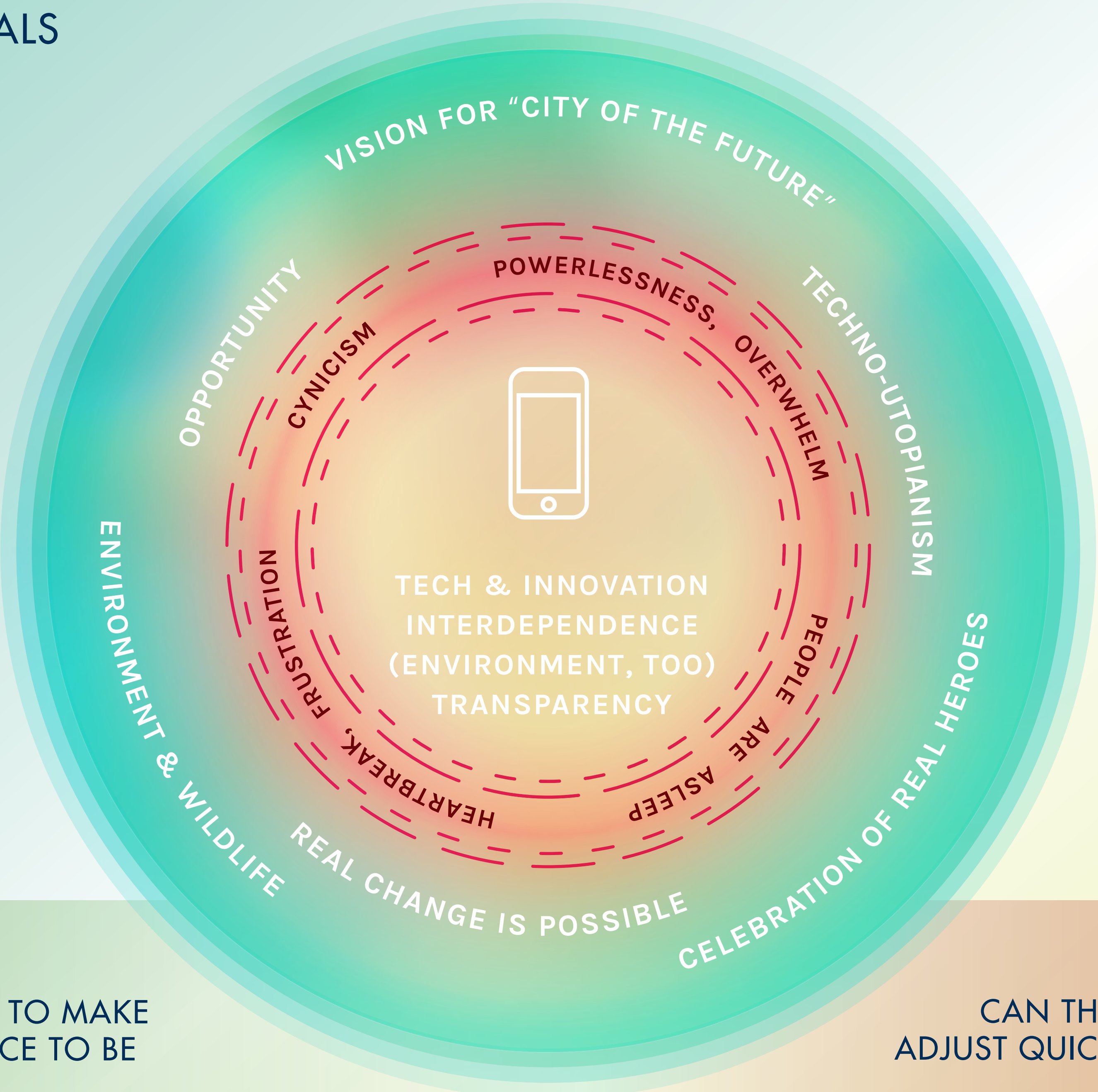


ARM ME WITH THE BEST INFORMATION AND I WILL SERVE



TOO KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT THE WEAKNESSES OF THE SYSTEM; CYNICAL

# MILLENNIALS



DETERMINED TO MAKE MIAMI A PLACE TO BE PROUD OF



CAN THE OLD SYSTEM ADJUST QUICKLY ENOUGH?

# Summary of Potential Messages

---

## BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Immediate action on SLR is an investment in *Miami's* future.

## FRONTLINES

Necessity is the mother of invention; let's embrace change.

## ECONOMICALLY VULNERABLE

We're all in this together; we have a seat at the table.

## POLITICAL INFLUENCERS

Arm me with the best information and I will serve (to mobilize people). The world is watching us now...

## MILLENNIALS

We're determined to make *Miami* a place to be proud of (to call home).

---

# Additional Learnings

*We identified TRENDS in climate-related communications. To be perceived as forward-thinking, stay in the EMERGENT field...*

## DOMINANT

Rational issue

Awareness

Conservative predictions

Lifestyle-preservation

Environmentalists

Maps

Data-driven stories

Blame, us vs. them

Isolated impacts

Mitigation

Worst case scenarios

## EMERGENT

Moral, ethical issue

Activism

Dire predictions, actual events

Sacrifice

Unlikely voices, politicians, CEOs

Apps

Human-centric stories

All of us are complicit, atonement

Interdependence, cause & effect

Regeneration

Plans of action



# Communication TACTICS can improve our chances of cutting through resistance and confusion.

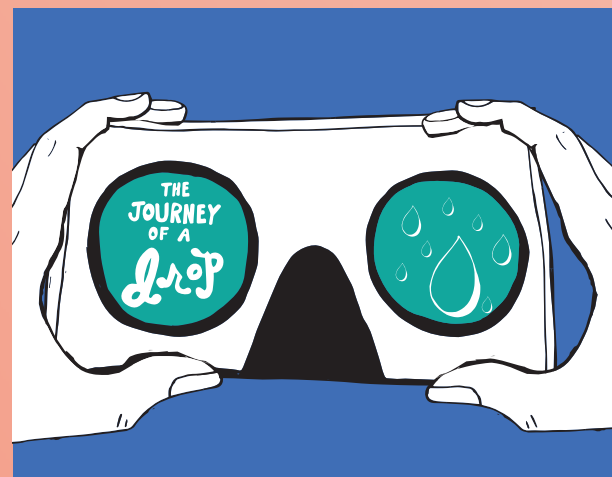
Keeping everyone on the same page: social media, and crowdsourced updates for open and collaborative communication  
Example: A "Waze-style" app for weather and water updates

Use of VR and social media to visualize the effects of SLR  
Example: *The Journey of a Drop of Water* shows the fragile ecosystem of South Florida

Mapping and visualizing various actions being taken by municipalities. Who is doing what?  
Example: Using tools like Loomio for collective decision-making and accountability.

Really engage and stimulate open and inclusive dialogue—in all languages spoken in Miami Dade.  
Example: Collecting real stories from real people, hosting and convening unlikely gatherings of people, community forums

Gamification: Using games and contests to involve more people in a playful and imaginative way. Less "doom and gloom"  
Example: "Selfies for Sea Level Rise," involving public schools, public artists, hack-a-thons.



Loomio is free and open-source software for anyone, anywhere, to participate in decisions that affect them.

