



Uniting Our Voices

A shared narrative for immigration messaging

It's time to tell a new story about immigration in this country. Current dominant narratives do not reflect our country's values, and are eroding public support for the kinds of policies our communities need. Meanwhile, negative discourse opens the door for dangerous and divisive proposals that serve no one beyond a narrow set of anti-immigrant activists. And while polls show these groups don't represent the public's views, they do tell a consistent, values-based story that has caught on in public discourse, popular culture, and political dialogue. We need to reclaim this conversation and infuse it with our solutions, our stories, and most importantly, our values.

Workable Solutions. Uphold Our Values. Move Forward Together

This memo sets out the tools we need to begin to counter harmful anti-immigrant narratives. We propose a flexible, values-based framework that we can use to start a variety of conversations: *We need workable solutions that uphold our values and help us move forward together.* These conversations can then move to specific issues and solutions, to specific statistics, and to compelling individual stories. But we believe that the more we all start the conversation in roughly the same place and begin our own drumbeat of values, the stronger our collective message will be, and the easier each subsequent conversation will be to start.

General Messaging Guidelines

This values framework is based on recent public opinion research, insight from media monitoring and analysis, and the experience of a broad range of immigration advocates, activists and immigrant themselves. This intelligence suggests the following principles for communications on immigrants:

Emphasize Workable Solutions: Americans across the political spectrum agree that our immigration system needs fixing and that it's unrealistic to deport 12 million people. Our communications should promote the kinds of solutions that provide for full economic and civic participation, and help our communities thrive. Anti-immigrant policies should be disparaged as reactionary policies that have been tried and failed to solve the problem.

Infuse Messages with Values: Americans are most likely support policies that welcome immigrants when they're reminded of our national values of opportunity, community, equality, shared responsibility, and in some cases, human rights. "Transactional" arguments about immigrants paying more in taxes than they "take" in services just reinforce the anti-immigrant frame of newcomers as a potential burden.

Encourage Moving Forward Together: Anti-immigrant groups are actively working to drive a wedge between immigrants, African Americans, and low-wage workers. It's important for us to convey our shared values and common interests (leading with values) as well as solutions that expand opportunity for everyone—e.g., combining an earned pathway to citizenship with enhanced civil rights enforcement, living wages, and job training for communities experiencing job insecurity.

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Remind Audiences that Immigrants are a Part of Us: Instead of describing immigrants as outsiders who are good for us, we should remind audiences that immigrants are a part of us, and always have been. (Note that this is different from saying “we’re a nation of immigrants,” which is off-putting for many African American and Native American audiences).

Know the dominant narrative: Anti-immigrant spokespeople are consistent in using two dominant themes, regardless of their specific point.

Law and Order

- “What part of ‘illegal’ don’t you understand?”
- Threat of Terrorism
- Ducking Taxes

Overwhelming Scarce Resources

- Job Competition
- Health Care Cost and Access
- Draining Social Services

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Building a Message

While our core narrative should remain the same and its themes should weave throughout all of our communications, we can build messages for different issues and audiences. One structure that communicators have found helpful is **Value, Problem, Solution, and Action**:

Value History shows that we move forward as a country when we welcome new immigrants and concentrate our combined energies on solving the problems we all face, and improving our communities.

Problem We are currently at a standstill on immigration policy. Immigrants want to be here legally; our current system just makes that almost impossible. Meanwhile, unscrupulous employers are exploiting this system denying workers across the board equal rights and pay, and preventing the collection of important streams of tax revenue.

Solution We need sensible immigration policies that recognize reality - immigrants are already contributing members of our communities. They are a crucial part of our economic engine and the social fabric of our society. They are part of the future of our country.

The obvious solution – and one that most Americans support – is to fix our immigration system so that everyone who lives here can contribute and participate fully and without fear.

Action Support policies that help our communities welcome immigrants, and solve our problems together.

Talking Point Guidelines

The following bullets are examples of how to illuminate the shared narrative. It is understood, however, that the immigration movement has diverse audiences, various regional needs, and faces a variety of challenges. But we share many of the same values. We propose weaving the narrative through your messaging, and using it as a guide. This way, it will begin to shape a familiar story to the public that will benefit us all, without attempting to force advocates into repeating uncomfortable rhetoric that doesn't work for them.

Workable Solutions

We need to emphasize that we are proposing reasonable and practical solutions that address our community's and our nation's real needs. Emphasizing workable solutions also allows us to paint the extreme anti-immigrant activists as promoting policies that only serve to divide, alienate, and punish while ignoring the real issues our communities face.

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- Unrealistic approaches like building walls at the border or treating immigrants so badly that they'll somehow pick up and "go home" have been tried and failed.
- Anti-immigrant extremists are preventing a legal immigration system that works and distracting us from addressing our real challenges on education, health care and employment.

Immigration Reform

- We need a realistic pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who work, pay taxes, and learn English. Immigrants want to come to America legally, but our current system makes that almost impossible. And we can't round up and deport 13 million people [and it would violate our values as a people to do so].
- A workable pathway to citizenship and human rights for current and future immigrants is crucial to the interests of our country and, especially, to the interests of working Americans. If our government keeps people in the shadows, without rights or a shot at the American Dream, it will depress the wages and job prospects of all workers in this country. And it will continue to violate our values as a nation. But if we move those people into the economic mainstream, we can rise together.

Local Anti-Immigrant Policies

- We've tried the policies of isolation and division, and they don't work for anybody. We need workable, inclusive policies that serve our entire state, even as we push the federal government to fix our broken immigration system.

Due Process:

- In America the punishment should fit the crime. Not allowing judges to consider the circumstances of a case violates this principle and does not solve the problem of undocumented immigration. We need to allow judges to consider the circumstances of each individual case and decide what is best for that situation. When the government denies due process to anyone in this country, it threatens the freedom of all of us.

Uphold Our Values

Research shows that the public reacts positively to values-based messages, and is motivated to protect the values they consider central to our country and our history. We can tap into this pride, and this motivation by underscoring that all immigration policies must reflect our values of:

Community	Equality	Shared Responsibility
Opportunity	Justice	Human Rights

- Immigrants are part of the fabric of our society—they are our neighbors, our co-workers, our friends. Reactionary policies that force them into the shadows haven't worked, and are not consistent with our values. Those policies hurt all of us by encouraging exploitation by unscrupulous employers and landlords. We support policies that help immigrants contribute and participate fully in our society.

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- For generations, and today, America represents a promise of opportunity. We need to develop an immigration system that integrates immigrants who come here to work, pay taxes, and learn English.
- Anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies are divisive and increasingly nasty; that's not what we stand for as a country.
- We must recognize the dignity and human rights of all people; preventing exploitation and upholding human rights is an important part of who we are as a people.
- We must welcome the stranger among us.

Due Process:

- We need to uphold our respect for due process, a fair hearing, and access to a lawyer are core American principles that we have to uphold.

Raids:

- Militarized raids on families and workplaces, brutal detention facilities, the lack of due process — these raids are un-American and a national shame. The United States was founded to reject violence and repression, not repeat it.

Family Reunification:

- Some propose that we ignore family ties in our immigration system. But Americans agree that honoring family is a core value, and one of the values that we most respect in others. Welcoming newcomers but separating and splitting their families is contrary to who we are as a nation.

Help Us Move Forward Together

We need to emphasize community values, the idea that we are all in this together and we're stronger when we realize this. Reminding people that the things that unite us are stronger than our differences puts them in a helpful frame of mind to consider immigration policies. It is important to underscore the notions of shared prosperity, economic and cultural contribution, and the fruits of combined efforts.

- We are for solutions that benefit communities, strengthen our economy, and create a system that works for everyone.
- We need shared solutions to improve health care, education, jobs, and the economy for everyone who lives here. Immigrants have a stake in those systems—we are caregivers and health professionals, teachers and students—and we are a part of the solution.
- Generations of immigrants have come to America in search of opportunity and have contributed to our shared prosperity; preserving that tradition is essential to our future in an increasingly connected world.
- Immigrants, including undocumented immigrants, are a part of our state's economic engine, and, most importantly, a part of our communities.

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- Immigrants play a vital role in our communities, our culture and our economy. We go to church, we volunteer with the PTA, we pay taxes and work at hard jobs that our economy needs.
- Our economy and our trade and immigration policies aren't working for anyone but a select few. Instead of scapegoating immigrants and terrorizing families and communities, we should make America work for all of us.

Mix and Match

To create messages based on the narrative, we can determine which elements are the most effective to the point we need to make and then weave them in. It's the cumulative effect of these messages that will ultimately create the narrative we need to start to put the immigration story back on track.

- We need to move from our broken immigration system to one that is orderly, workable, and consistent with our nation's values. We can do that by allowing immigrants who work, pay taxes, and learn English to earn a pathway to citizenship. Those steps, along with reforms like increased civil rights enforcement and sanctions for employers that exploit workers will raise wages and expand economic opportunity for everyone.
- A pathway to citizenship and human rights for current and future immigrants is crucial to the interests of our country and, especially, to the interests of working Americans. If our government keeps people in the shadows, without rights or a shot at the American Dream, it will depress the wages and job prospects of all workers in this country. And it will continue to violate our values as a nation. But if we move those people into the economic mainstream, we can rise together.

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