



Rise Above: Countering Fear-Based Messaging

The past few months have seen an increased volume of rhetoric that manufactures fear toward African Americans, Latinos, Muslims, and immigrants. Our goal in this research was to identify narratives that counter fear-based messaging, move persuadable Americans to embrace diversity as a foundational value, and to explore the particular words and phrases that motivate our target audiences to action.

Messaging Recommendations

- 1. Link diversity to problem solving, strength, and healthy communities rather than economic competition.** Talk about how we need to take advantage of our source of strength in diversity. Be aspirational, positive, and talk about embracing our differences.
- 2. Define opportunity through the means that enable a tangible payoff: pursuing an education and getting a good paying job or career.** Position discrimination as a barrier to opportunity and to those payoffs.
- 3. Acknowledge that some people might be uncomfortable with change when asserting the importance of diversity.**
- 4. Highlight the importance of getting to know and accepting people from different backgrounds as a solution and a strength.**
- 5. When talking about universal values of being American that should apply to all people, explicitly say “no matter what someone looks like/where they come from/what their race is.”**
- 6. Talk about our need to hold the wealthiest corporations and individuals accountable for paying their fair share.** People are prone to think in zero sum terms. Repositioning the “haves” as the wealthiest corporations (instead of people receiving government assistance) is more effective than trying to argue we all do better when we all do better.
- 7. Talk about shared values of respect, dignity, and everyone’s basic rights.**

Base (33% of adults)

They strongly embrace diversity, believe it helps us solve problems; believe discrimination towards many groups is a very serious problem; and see a strong role for government in ensuring everyone has opportunity.

They are more likely to be women, younger, Democratic, and African American.

Persuadables (50% of adults)

They have attitudes that overlap with both base and opposition.

They more closely reflect the demographics of registered voters, but a slightly higher percentage are Latino.

Opposition (17% of adults)

They are either ambivalent or against diversity; believe government assistance has created a culture of dependency; and believe minorities use racism as an excuse for their own failures.

They are more likely to be male, older, white, from the South, and Republican.

Methodology

Focus Groups: Lake Research Partners conducted six focus groups in 2017 in Charlotte, North Carolina on January 23 with white women and mixed gender African Americans, in Phoenix, Arizona on January 25 with white men and mixed gender Latinos, and in Baltimore, Maryland on February 15 with white men and white women. Participants were recruited to be moderate to independent lean-partisan, with a mix of marital status and education level.

National Online Dial Survey: Lake Research Partners designed and administered a survey conducted online from March 1 through 6, 2017. The survey reached a total of 1,000 registered voters nationwide with oversamples of 100 African Americans, 100 Latinos, and 100 Millennials. The margin of error for the nationwide adults sample is +/-3.1%. It is larger for subgroups. The sample of activists was conducted March 2 through 24.

Messaging Do's and Don'ts

When opponents call it political correctness: Call out manufactured fear as “bait” from “politicians trying to divide us.”

When opponents talk about safety: Talk instead about strength and how fear makes us weaker.

Provide a strong call to action:

- ✓ Remove the barriers of discrimination that hold people back.
- ✓ Lean in to ideas that unify us as a diverse people and make us stronger.
- ✓ Speak out against discrimination and scapegoating when we see it.

Say	Instead of	Notes
“Foundational” values	“Important” values	Implies that other socially desirable ends depend on those values.
Diversity helps us “solve problems” or “makes us stronger”	Diversity helps us “compete economically”	Strength and problem solving are broader goals, and they resonate more strongly with our base.
We need to “heal the wounds” of racism	We need to “interrupt” racism	Framing bigotry as a harm that causes wounds is a stronger call to action.
People, no matter where they come from	People	We need to be explicit that we mean everyone.
Reducing hatred by “getting to know each other”	Reducing hatred by “teaching tolerance”	People believe hatred is taught, and people getting to know each other is the best way to undo what has been learned.
We	I	People believe that “we” can do something to change racial attitudes, more so than themselves alone.

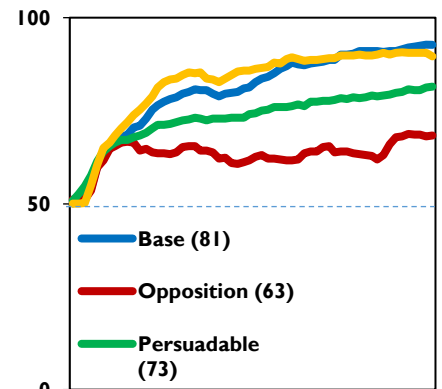
- ✓ **DO** link diversity to core values of freedom, opportunity, respect, and dignity.
- ✓ **DO** talk about the need to embrace or accept people’s differences.
- ✓ **DO** acknowledge that change can make some people uncomfortable.
- ✓ **DO** explicitly mention race and racial differences, but do so after leading with a core shared value.
- ✓ **DO** talk about the barriers of discrimination in the context of age, race, and gender.

Top Messages

Messages were tested for moment-to-moment responses in the online survey. Below are the winning messages that beat the opposition argument and increase people's willingness to take action. The lines on the graphs are the moment-to-moment reactions to an audio recording of each message by our base, opposition, persuadables, and activists. People dialed positively (above 50) when they had a favorable reaction to the words, and negatively (below 50) when they had an unfavorable reaction. The number in parentheses represents the mean dial rating for that message. Passages in **bold** were especially effective.

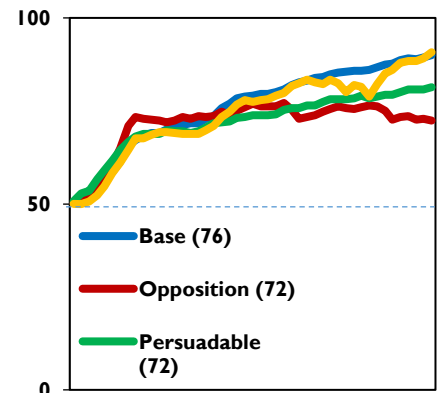
Diversity as Strength

We are stronger when we work together and when we learn from each other's experiences, united as Americans. When people from different backgrounds **join together we all benefit from the diversity** of those perspectives. It helps us find **new ways to deal with old challenges**. But we are **not taking full advantage** of this source of strength. If we **embraced our diversity and valued the views of our fellow Americans, we'd be more likely to find solutions to our problems** and better ensure that everyone has the **opportunity to pursue their dreams**. Whether white, Black, or Latino, whether Christian, Jew, or Muslim, we are all Americans. **We need to embrace our different experiences, perspectives, and cultures because united we stand, and divided we fall.**



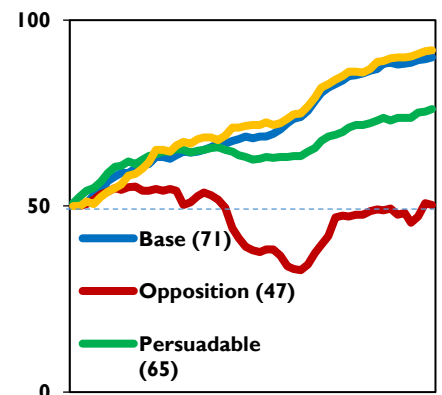
Real America

America is a nation of values, founded on an idea - that all men and women are created equal. And while we all have our circles, whether they are our family, co-workers, or friends on Facebook, **how we treat others outside of our circles reflects our commitment to the values that define us as Americans.** It's not about what you look like or where you were born that makes you American - **it's how you live your life and what you do that defines you here in this country.** We are better, as people, and as a country, when we **welcome our neighbors, care for each other, and help those in need.** We are better when we embrace our differences.



Pragmatism

Our country is changing, getting more and more diverse. **It might make some of us uncomfortable, but it is our reality,** and a constant throughout our history. **Politicians play on this fear, trying to divide us.** They push unwise and divisive ideas like sending federal troops to police our cities, building a border wall, or singling out Muslim Americans because of their religion. **If we take the bait on these, it makes our country weaker, not stronger.** Our nation is stronger when every one of us can contribute and share ideas, and when everyone's basic rights and dignity are respected. We need to embrace ideas that **unify us as a diverse people and make our country stronger, and we need to speak out against discrimination and prejudice when we see it.**



Rise Above: A Leadership and Communications Initiative To Uphold An Accurate Story of Us

NCLR launched the Rise Above initiative, joining hands with The Opportunity Agenda and Lake Research Partners, to tap the foundational values enshrined in “We the people, in order to form a more perfect union,” which signal our America is a work in progress that calls for collaboration and agency to ensure our reality matches our ideals

Issues such as immigration, crime, and the economy have become proxies to stir anxiety over demographic change, divide Americans from one another, and weaken the role of civil society in shaping the direction of the country.

Unchallenged, this toxic narrative can cause irreparable harm to the future cohesion of our society and our ability to come together to solve the problems facing the nation.

This effort is designed to explore and create tools all of us can use to advance a positive vision of our nation’s shared future, a common melody that entices us to rise above fear and differences, and taps the strength of our diversity to foster a collaborative spirit among America’s communities. Rise Above is a concerted effort to help build and take hold an accurate “**Story of Us**” – of who we are and aspire to be as a country. One that:

- Recognizes the strength in our diversity and accurately sees it as one of our greatest national assets
- Has a place for every one of us, regardless of color, accent, origin or affiliation
- Brings our people together to tackle our challenges and generate real solutions

Together we can build a common melody that elevates the ideal America represents, ignites problem solving, and strengthens the lyrics of the specific issues each of us works on. To build that common melody, we are sharing the results of our research, and tools to apply them to our work.

Changing the toxicity in our environment will take a concerted effort across communities – we look forward to engaging with all those interested in strengthening our civil society to improve these tools, and bring our networks together to help the true American Story of Us take hold.

National Council of La Raza

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