

Community Values Communication Toolkit

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Immigration Talking Points and Messaging Examples

Immigration replenishes our country's workers, communities, and traditions. While we advocate for policies that encourage integration and protect the rights of immigrants, we should point out that immigrants are, and have always been, a part of us. They are central to our society, diversity, productivity and success. Doing so reminds audiences that Community Values are more compelling than the exclusion and punishment anti-immigration advocates favor.

Our increasingly interconnected world also provides openings for talking about immigration through the lens of community values and interdependence. We can't ignore that we're participating in a global economy and labor is part of the equation. While goods and profits easily cross borders every day, workforces operate under entirely different rules. Understanding how our economy interacts with others, and the push and pull of economic forces, may help audiences to understand immigration better. However, we don't want to suggest that we only value or tolerate immigrants because of the economic contributions they make. Community values stresses the human connections we all have as well, beyond our economic interdependence.

Using the Value, Problem, Solution, Action Model

- Value:** Immigrants are part of the fabric of our society—they are our neighbors, our co-workers, our friends.
- Problem:** Reactionary policies that force them into the shadows haven't worked, and are not consistent with our values. Those policies hurt us all by encouraging exploitation by unscrupulous employers and landlords.
- Solution:** We support policies that help immigrants contribute and participate fully in our society.
- Action:** Ask your candidates what they would do to ensure that immigrants are treated fairly and given a voice in this country.

Messaging Examples

- For America to be a land of opportunity for everyone who lives here, our policies must recognize that we're all in it together, with common human rights and responsibilities. If one group can be exploited, underpaid and prevented from becoming part of our society, none of us will enjoy the opportunity and rights that America stands for.
- Reactionary, anti-immigrant policies – both federal and local - have repeatedly failed to fix the problem. They're not workable and they're not fair to citizens or to immigrants. We're all in this together and there's no question that we need each other. Such policies of exclusion violate the core sense of community that has always driven the policies that have moved this country forward.

- Our immigration system should reflect that immigrants have always been part of this nation and that without their contributions, we would cease to thrive. But immigration isn't just a domestic issue; it's an international reality. We need comprehensive immigration reform that works for the good of all and reflects the interdependence of nations, communities, and workers.
- Since the rise of globalization, interdependence between countries has grown. More and more, economies and labor markets are tied together. And communities and families span national borders. We need solutions that recognize our interdependence, that we're all in it together. And we need to reject divisive and impractical policies that ignore the importance of family and community.
- The economic ties between nations can be mutually beneficial, boosting well-being in both countries. But too often, some – usually multinational corporations – benefit over others. This lack of balance is destructive to communities both at home and abroad. Lacking prospects for jobs that pay enough to support their families, workers in the U.S. often find only low-wage jobs without benefits. Meanwhile, those from communities abroad, seeking out better opportunities here, are too often underpaid and exploited..
- Once here, workers rightfully set down roots and form families. By some estimates, more than three million citizen children have a parent who is among the twelve million immigrants lacking legal status.¹ The recent rash of raids, detentions and deportations has shown what kind of damage our nation's broken immigration system is doing to families. Even beyond nuclear families, immigrants are integral members of communities across the country with deep relationships that transcend immigration status.
- It's in all our interest for people who are here legally in this new system to become part of our society, with roots and responsibilities here. Honoring family ties is essential to that process of becoming an American and ensuring strong communities. 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.
- America's broken immigration system affects us all. Anti-immigration forces have focused on racial, economic and cultural divides that have nothing to do with our core values. At our best, we're a welcoming country that values immigrants' contributions and recognizes our common humanity. We have to reject any rhetoric or policy with undertones of racism or intolerance, or that cause or contribute to economic exploitation and poverty.

Comprehensive Immigration Reform

- An earned pathway to citizenship for current and future immigrants is crucial to the interests of our country. It's especially important for working Americans. If our government keeps people in the shadows, without rights, or a shot at the American

¹ See Press Release on "Unauthorized Migrants: Numbers and Characteristics"
<http://pewhispanic.org/newsroom/releases/release.php?ReleaseID=33>

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.

- Any proposal that would allow people to work, but not become full members of society violates our most basic values. This country is built on the idea that if you come here, work and pay taxes, you have a shot at the American Dream. It's this mixture of work and hope that has fueled our country's growth from the start. We need to build on that historic value when we create a new system. We need a fair system that rewards work instead of exploiting it.

Local Ordinances

- As long as our federal immigration system is broken, it's up to local communities to decide how to work with immigrants. Would you rather live in a place that understands the meaning of Community Values, of working together with immigrants to find solutions? Or a place that moves toward punitive, exclusionary measures? In this country, we value people, and we value treating them the right way. Cooperation and common sense solutions for the common good are the way to go.
- Communities across the country are struggling with the bind that the federal government has put them in by neglecting to address immigration. Many are finding ways to address the reality of their communities by working with immigrants – both documented and undocumented – to create workable solutions. However, in too many communities, anti-immigrant forces have exploited uncertain times by proposing divisive and mean-spirited ordinances that only exacerbate the problem, push immigrants out of the community and hurt the local economy.

Immigration Fact Sheet

Community Values and Immigration

Recently, this country has engaged in a very challenging, and often gut-wrenching, debate about what immigration means in the “Land of Opportunity.” According to the United States Census Bureau, an estimated 35 million people – our families, friends, neighbors, and co-workers – are foreign born. The contributions of immigrants in America are immeasurable, and their experiences have strengthened communities far and wide for generations.

Sadly, opponents of immigration spread myths about immigrants, and the debate over immigration reform became dominated by characterizations of immigrants as criminals, illegal, and threats to American workers. Despite the fact that the reform legislation was driven by the interests of a broad coalition of workers, businesses and immigrants, the dominance of very vocal anti-immigrant forces in the public discussions about immigration had a major impact on policy-making. This past summer, Congress failed to act on a comprehensive immigration reform proposal.

Looking ahead to the politics of 2008, we can anticipate conservative candidates, as well as some moderate and progressive candidates, to use the issue of immigration to polarize and divide our community in order to advance their campaigns. In light of this political challenge, future iterations of this toolkit will include additional information that will support local efforts to educate constituencies on the impact of immigration politics on Community Values.

All people fare better when every individual – regardless of citizenship status – has a fair chance to fulfill his or her dreams.

Dispelling Myths about the Workplace and Emergency Care Use

Immigration policy that relies solely on economic and wage analysis is neither comprehensive nor truly accurate. The body of research around the “competition question,” that is, whether immigrants replace native workers in available jobs, is widely divergent. Thus no single conclusion can be drawn regarding the displacement of native-born workers by the foreign born. A compilation of research by the Migration Policy Institute found that:

- Although immigrants make up 14% of the workforce, they are disproportionately represented in the low-wage population (20%). Still, immigrants make up higher proportions of the workforce in several high-skill occupations and sectors.
- Policies that address only the enforcement of immigration laws are meant to limit the number of undocumented workers in the U.S. A study of U.S.-Mexico border communities revealed that an enforcement-only approach had no positive effect on the wages of native workers.
- Research from 15 large states showed a correlation between an influx of immigrants and a shift in the employment sectors that relied on the skills of the new immigrants. This finding asserts that local markets are capable of absorbing immigrant workers without causing wages to fall.

Using Census Bureau data at the state level, the Pew Hispanic Center analyzed the affect of foreign-born population growth on native-born workers from 1990 to 2000, and then again

from 2000 to 2004. After factoring for education levels, age, and growth rate, the presence of foreign-born workers had no impact on the employment of native-born workers in the time periods 1990–2000 and 2000–04. Among the findings were:

- In 2000 nearly 25% of native-born workers lived in states with rapid foreign-born population growth from 1990 to 2000 and where favorable employment outcomes for native born were associated.
- Between 2000 and 2004 there was a positive correlation between foreign-born population growth and employment for native-born workers in 27 states and the District of Columbia. Native-born workers in those states accounted for 67% of the nation’s native-born workforce.
- Although many of today’s newcomers lack education and are relatively young, their arrival in the U.S. had no clear impact on their native-born counterparts: workers ages 25–34 with low levels of education.

A study of emergency departments in 12 nationally representative communities found that the highest rates of use were not by patients who were uninsured, low-income, racial or ethnic minorities, or noncitizens. The study, conducted by the Washington D.C.-based Center for Studying Health System Change, found instead that:

- Immigration is not a contributing factor to emergency department crowding nationally, even in communities with a large population of Hispanic immigrants.
- Compared to citizens, noncitizens had much lower levels on average of emergency department use: about 17 fewer visits per 100 people.

Facing Inequality and Discrimination

Community Values mean we all have equal access to the benefits, burdens, and responsibilities of our society. In order to fully contribute and participate in society, immigrants and the native born alike should be treated equally regardless of race, gender, religion, country of origin, and other aspects of what people look like and where they come from.

- Between 1992 and 2003 nearly 8,500 complaints were filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) on the basis of national-origin discrimination.
- The number of national-origin discrimination complaints filed with the EEOC by women increased 29% during this period.
- In 2005 foreign-born noncitizens were nearly twice as likely to live in poverty as native-born citizens. Strikingly, naturalized citizens had a poverty rate that was lower than that of native-born citizens.

Recommendations

If America is to fulfill its promise of opportunity, we must implement an integration strategy that welcomes immigrants and gives newcomers an equal chance to fully contribute to and participate in society. We recommend the following measures:

Several strategies must be developed, including greater support for programs such as health care, English-language classes, and other social services that provide basic assistance to immigrants.

- Immigrant workers should be assisted in learning about workplace rights, fair wages and benefits, and the means to garner legal assistance to protect these rights.
- Other programs should encourage public education and outreach to raise newcomers' awareness of the federal naturalization process, and to increase the availability of civics education and other programs useful for gaining citizenship.
- Voter-education programs and other efforts to increase political participation should be provided to stimulate political engagement and empowerment among new citizens.

Applying Community Values to an Immigration Op-ed

Op-eds are a good opportunity to talk directly to a number of different audiences. You have a higher degree of message control than in other pieces, so it's important to be mindful of your framing themes and language.

Practically speaking, op-eds should usually run no more than 500-700 words. Many outlets include op-ed guidelines and instructions for submission on their website. In pitching an op-ed, you need to make the case for why the topic is of interest now, why you are the person to address it, and why your angle will interest readers.

It's important to remember that while it can be tempting to launch directly into a litany of complaints in an opinion piece, it is a prime place to use the Value, Problem, Solution, Action model.

Conflict or Community? By Alan Jenkins

With the failure of Congress and the president to pass immigration reform this year, states, cities and towns around the country are moving forward with their own policies to address the issue. Some, like the city of New Haven, Conn., and the state of Illinois are attempting to integrate immigrants—including undocumented immigrants—into their communities in the absence of federal solutions. Others, like Hazelton, Pa., and Prince William County, Va., are adopting policies that punish undocumented immigrants and, with them, many citizens, families, small businesses and whole communities.

The better course, by far, is integrating new immigrants in ways that move everyone in the community forward.

The opening paragraph links the issue the author wants to discuss with current events. This is important not only in telling the reader why they should care, but in interesting editors in publishing the piece in the first place.

The author is also careful to incorporate Community Values right off the bat to describe who this issue affects – not just undocumented immigrants, but everyone.

The author follows up the description of the problem with a quick mention of solution. It's important to pair the two whenever possible so that your piece is not just another list of complaints.

On July 26, a federal court struck down anti-immigrant ordinances in Hazelton as unconstitutional. The voided provisions would, among other things, have required tenants to register with City Hall and fined landlords who rent to people without verifying their immigration status. The federal district court held that the ordinances would have violated due process and are preempted by federal immigration laws.

This section gives context and specifics to the problem. In this case, the author is able to draw on several examples, which frames the issue as about our entire society, not isolated groups, towns or individuals.

Prince William County recently passed a similar ordinance that would bar undocumented immigrants from public facilities and services like clinics, libraries and schools, and have police inquire about the immigration status of people whom they stop. The American Civil Liberties Union reports that 40 similar ordinances have passed in cities and towns around the country.

Contrasting the negative with the positive is also effective in pointing out the systemic aspects of the issue. Additionally, solutions are given a full description.

Contrast this with the city of New Haven, which has moved to integrate immigrants while improving the quality of life of all of its residents. The city has adopted a municipal ID card that is available to all residents, irrespective of their immigration status. The card allows the holder to open a bank account, access municipal parks, libraries and other services.

Audiences can also understand here what positive solutions look like and that integrating immigrants is the norm in some places, in spite of the divisive rhetoric that has dominated the national conversation.

In adopting the card policy, the city recognized that not only undocumented immigrants but many other New Haven residents lack a driver's license or other official ID, preventing them from opening a bank account, thwarting savings, and making them vulnerable to robbery and exploitation. At the emotional level, the card offers a sense of community belonging and cohesion that is often lacking from urban life.

Then-Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich took a similar approach late in 2005, recognizing in an executive order that "it is beneficial for new immigrants, the host communities, the state, and the nation for immigrants to quickly adjust to life in Illinois, learn English, become citizens, buy homes, start businesses, send their children to college, and thrive economically." The executive order initiated the creation of a New Americans Immigrant Policy and ordered state agencies to develop New Americans plans.

Time will tell what results these and other initiatives around the country achieve. But the New Haven and Illinois initiatives are clearly moving in the right direction. The best immigrant integration policies are practical, forward-looking and consistent with our country's best values. The 12 million undocumented immigrants in the US are here to stay—it would be both impossible and contrary to our values to round them up and deport them. And vindictive anti-immigrant policies have consistently failed to solve the problem.

This paragraph hints at the arguments opponents are likely to make in response to this piece. The author addresses the idea of deportation and also admits that there is a problem – not knowing the identities and whereabouts of 12 million people here. But the paragraph rejects anti-immigration policies as viable solutions.

Inclusive integration policies recognize that both documented and undocumented immigrants are part of our communities and part of our nation; they are our neighbors and co-workers and part of our country's economic engine. At the same time, they recognize that many American citizens are struggling for decent jobs, education, services and financial security. The best policies unite instead of divide our communities. They represent a search for solutions that help us all to rise together.

Here the author invokes Community Values in pointing to inclusive solutions. By tying together our economic fate, and emphasizing positive, shared solutions, the author points the reader in a clear direction.

But there's more that must be done. While undocumented immigrants contribute economically to our communities, they are frequently subject to underpayment and exploitation on the job. That's bad for all of us, as it depresses wages and conditions for all workers.

Building on the integration argument, the author goes further, again invoking Community Values to show how we're all connected. This argument then allows the author to reject the bad treatment of immigrants on both moral and practical grounds.

Rather than adding to the mistreatment of immigrants—and furthering their economic vulnerability—cities and states must insist on decent workplace conditions and living wages while teaching all residents about their rights and responsibilities.

Here the solution names specific actors and continues to tie together everyone's interests and fates.

In addition, racial discrimination persists as a problem for native-born people of color as well as immigrants. In many workplaces, immigrants are preferred over African Americans and other minority citizens for low-paying jobs, while higher paying jobs are reserved for whites. Cities and states have a responsibility, as does the federal government, to identify and eliminate discriminatory practices and ensure equal employment opportunity.

Finally, while it's convenient to blame immigrants or the undocumented for overcrowded hospitals and under-resourced schools, these problems existed long before today's immigrants arrived in our country. Providing quality services is government's most basic responsibility, and it must do so in ways that serve the whole community.

The final paragraph again rejects popular anti-immigrant arguments by invoking a government responsibility and Community Values frame. It ends by reminding us of what our priority should always be: solutions that serve the community.

Applying Community Values with Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor are a quick and effective way to weigh in on issues that the media frequently cover. Often, more people read the letters page than the pages where the original article appeared or the opinion page, so there is great potential for readership here. Letters do need to be short and straight to the point and shouldn't exceed 150 words, which can be a challenge. It's usually best to focus on one point. In the examples below, the letters focus on weaving Community Values into a call for federal immigration reform.

It's also important to note that letters do not need to be negative. Responding to an article that positively portrayed an issue you care about can set a tone friendlier to Community Values than the confrontational tone central to letters of disagreement.

The letters below respond to an article that examined how immigration was affecting Marshalltown, Iowa in both good and bad ways.

"To the Editor:

Your recent article about Marshalltown, Iowa and its experience with immigration was a real eye opener. In the divisive rhetoric we hear in the immigration debates, I feel that this human story of community values is so often lost. Absent in this story were the one dimensional stereotypes of oppressive law enforcement or problematic immigrants. Instead, we saw a community-minded portrait of people working together to make the best of a system over which they have no control.

I believe we need more realistic reflections about what immigration really means to communities like Marshalltown, Iowa. Immigrants are already clearly a part of the community, why can't the federal government not clear the way for positive integration, so that everyone can move forward?"

This letter poses itself as from an everyday reader who doesn't necessarily have strong feelings about the immigration debate. Often advocates, or those with an obvious side, are more likely to be dismissed by on-the-fence readers. Unlike op-eds or other communications, letters to the editor can strike a more neutral tone and still be effective.

By emphasizing and approving of the community portrait the article offers, the letter consistently promotes the idea of Community Values.

After priming the audience with a reasonable tone, the letter offers a solution and mentions the actor responsible.

“To the Editor:

Thank you for your informative portrait of one town’s experience with immigration. While this piece shows that we still have a long way to go, it also illustrates the community values that will ultimately help us address this issue. In each community connection she describes, the author shows how the residents of Marshalltown, Iowa understand the complexities and realities of our current immigration system.

Marshalltown needs and values immigrants, their work, and their contributions to the community. Yet the town’s ability to welcome its newest residents continues to be strangled by the federal governments’ inability to pass reasonable legislation. Instead of giving into the politics of division and isolation favored by anti-immigration forces, these Iowans have chosen to think about immigration in a community-spirited, humane and practical manner. The federal government should take note.

The letter starts by referencing the article to which it is responding.

The letter uses the term Community Values to describe solutions and underscores this with complementary terms like “community connections” and “community-spirited.”

The letter embraces the positive parts of the article. Doing so reminds those who have read the original article of only the good points. It also paints a specific picture for those who didn’t read the original piece.

In calling for solutions, the letter names specific actors and actions.