



Amplifying Organizing

Using race-forward narratives in organizing programs



This guide is designed to help you win.

We'll walk through how to use [Race Class Narrative \(RCN\)](#) and other empirically-based messaging research on the doors, in the streets, and at the mic.

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Introduction

Building a multiracial democracy requires effective communication, in person, and online. Every organizer, campaigner, and advocate is faced with the same fundamental challenge: we need to spread the word about our cause in order to meet our goal. By spreading a narrative across layered modes of communication – including real time organizing – we can win power on our issues, in our statehouses, and at the ballot box.

Field and community organizers looking to find messaging guidance often face the challenge that many messaging resources are designed for communications professionals. This guide is designed for Organizing Directors, Canvassing Leads, and others who oversee field and organizing programs. Whether you're an organizer or spokesperson, an Executive Director or volunteer, we hope you find it useful for translating messaging guidance into authentic communication. With this in mind, we'll walk through some best practices alongside a case study example.

In 2019, ISAIAH¹ won a referendum for coordinated collective trash, an issue that required a multiyear campaign to build power in St. Paul, Minnesota. You can read how they won better public services in the [full campaign report](#). The examples we give are loosely based on the trash coordination campaign to show you how in an organizing campaign you can:

¹ ISAIAH is a multi-racial, state-wide, nonpartisan coalition of faith communities, Black barbershops, childcare centers, and other community based constituencies fighting for racial and economic justice in Minnesota.

- Use an overarching message to tell a coordinated story;
- Anchor public speeches in the RCN architecture; and
- Name race, build collective power, and describe a villain's actions while canvassing.

We'll follow this case study throughout several modes of communication to show how a layered campaign works in practice.

Start With an Overarching Message

Campaigns – whether electoral, issue advocacy, or other forms of organizing – should be rooted within a narrative. The narrative provides an overarching collection of themes and ideas that tell a broad story of the campaign. Throughout the duration of a campaign, a narrative grounds all communication, and can be adapted across modes of communication.

From that **narrative**, you need to create an overarching **message**. An overarching message includes the specific words that we use to tell our story of our issue. It can be adapted to [meet the audience](#) and context of the moment.

Narrative ↓

Message ↓

 Literature  Speech  Canvass Script  Tweet  Video

The [Race Class Narrative](#) (RCN) offers a cohesive, proven architecture to write your overarching message. ISAIAH's overarching message for the campaign was built upon the RCN.

Case Study: Overarching Message

Here's an example overarching message from ISAIAH's trash referendum campaign:

Race Class Narrative Architecture

1. Values
2. Villains
3. Victories
4. Vision
5. Call to Action

Overarching Message

(1) Minnesotans of every race, religion, and in every zip code are committed to each other, and we are ready to ensure that all of our families thrive. **(2)** Years ago, as our city got more racially diverse, a few politicians tried to divide us based on what we look like so they could make decisions without our input. They privatized our trash collection, leaving families paying different rates and sometimes never getting their trash collected at all. We moved forward with coordinated trash collection last year, but now, those same politicians want us to go backwards, wasting time and money. **(3)** Whether Black or white, rich or poor, Muslim or Christian, as neighbors in St. Paul, we have an opportunity to create something innovative and better for all of us. We can create a community where people aren't stuck with outrageous bills and no one's trash goes uncollected. Let's move forward together and fight to make that trash collection contract fair for all of us. **(4)** Together we can achieve solutions like affordable housing, healthier air, and trash collection operators who keep our neighborhoods clean, which value all

residents of St. Paul, no exceptions. **(5)** Vote yes on the residential coordinated collection ballot referendum by November 5th.

Public Speaking

Using your overarching message as a guide, your spokespeople can participate in public events with consistent and strategic talking points in their planned speeches and unscripted responses to questions.

Case Study: Planned Speech

During the trash referendum campaign, organizers participated in a public debate. JaNaé Bates, Director of Communications at ISAIAH, represented the Vote Yes side. Her planned [five-minute opening statement](#) uses the full overarching message and uses the RCN architecture to contextualize the campaign in history:



Here's a breakdown of how she used the overarching message to contextualize the campaign in history:

- **Values:** "Many years ago...we had coordinated trash collection... city workers were making a livable, fair wage, and we threw down together to keep our city clean."
- **Villains:** "A few politicians decided [trash] would be best to be privatized," which led to "people of color getting hurt, ... and poor white neighbors also getting impacted."
- **Victories:** "Regardless of where we live, what we look like, or what our background is, we are ready to do this with one another. An amendment is possible, as a matter of fact...there was an amendment that already happened this summer."
- **Vision:** "When we come together...we can have all the great and awesome things we deserve."
- **Call to Action:** "Thank you. I hope you all vote yes with me for St. Paul."

Once you bring your audience through the overarching message, you can start to play with the order. At this town hall, JaNaé added more about victories, because it was part of their campaign's strategy to combat cynicism and a "dominant narrative that Saint Paulites don't want to work together to address bold solutions."

Case Study: Unscripted Response

With limited time, you can choose specific parts of the RCN architecture, without having to include the complete narrative structure. [Later in the debate](#), JaNaé did this unscripted when responding to opposition challenges and moderator questions by only using the **Victories** and **Vision** sections of the RCN architecture.

Vote No speaker: *"If Vote Yes wins, I want the first call JaNaé makes to be to me, to say 'how are we gonna change these things...'"*

Moderator: *"...Given this, what does a vote no or a vote yes mean? You have 3 minutes."*

JaNaé:

- **Victories:** "So a vote yes means that we continue our coordinated collective trash, which it's important to name is working for many many people. There are many people who have a lower bill. There are many people who are happy with the services they are getting. There are many people who are ready to move forward."
- **Vision:** "There are also folks who are having issues, and that is why we're gonna come together as a city – and that is all of us. Because every single person who will show up at City Hall is there on behalf of not just themselves but their neighbor. And we'll make sure that we can get the proper amendment so that the contract works equitably for all of us."

Let your strategy guide what parts of the architecture you use to respond. This works whether you're in front of a microphone or at a neighbor's door.

Canvassing Scripts

Your canvassing script can have the RCN architecture woven throughout, and it is good to encourage your canvassers to have authentic conversations. Prepare canvassers to **become fluent with two ways to name race**: To build collective power and describe a villain's actions.

When we name identities or aspects of racialized experiences, we build our collective power across races, classes, and genders. This helps people feel seen and affirmed, and acknowledges our differences with dignity. So work together with canvassers to [create options that resonate](#) with your community, issue, or geographic location.

When neighbors share a concern, prepare canvassers to show how the villain's actions relate to their concerns, [acknowledge racial disparities](#), and talk about collective solutions. This combats cynicism by linking action to past victories and the power of collective action.

Case Study: Canvassing Script

This basic canvassing script uses the RCN architecture and has canvassers name race. The example script is a mix of persuasion and mobilization. For each script section, we've included adaptation questions to help you modify your own scripts. Then, we show what it looks like with the trash campaign.

Introduce Yourself

Adaptation questions: How can you connect with cross-racial solidarity and a shared value from the beginning?

- Hello, is [Voter First Name] available? My name is [Your Name] and I'm a volunteer with ISAIAH - an organization working to create a Saint Paul where we all can thrive, whether we're Black, white, or brown. How are you doing today?

Clarify the Purpose and Stakes

Adaptation questions: How can your vision of the campaign's outcomes resonate with the neighbor? How is this vision connected to your call to action?

- Have you heard about the referendum?
- I believe we are at our best as a city when we solve the big things together even when it gets hard, from affordable housing to solutions for climate change to great public schools. And even trash.
- On a scale of 1-5, how supportive are you of the trash collection referendum, with 1 being very supportive and 5 being not supportive?
- Record response:
 - 1- Strong support
 - 2- Weak support Yes
 - 3- Undecided
 - 4- Weak Oppose No
 - 5- Strong Oppose
 - 6- Not Voting
 - 7- Unaware/Unfamiliar
- If 1, continue to make a plan for action.
- If 2-4, continue to engage.
- If 5, thank them and close.
- If 6, ask why. If it clarifies they are actually 2-4, then continue to engage. If not, thank them and close.
- If 7, describe the campaign using our overarching message.

Engage

Adaptation questions: How can you highlight the ways their concern is because of the villain and their tactics of racial division or scapegoating? How are we countering their tactics with collective action across our differences? What values are you hearing the voter name that you can reflect back with a multiracial "we?"

- If they have concerns about Vote YES, have a conversation. See talking points sheet. Example:
 - **Concern:** "This trash collection system is costing me/other people more."
 - **Response:** "Yes, there are growing pains with this new organized trash collection system. Unfortunately, for years some greedy politicians have tried to divide us based on what we look like, so they can make decisions without our input, including privatizing our trash collection so we don't work together for solutions we all need. They benefit when we make decisions out of fear and division from each other. Over time, we can work out these challenges and make a process that is more transparent and inclusive because the reality is, whether we're from the West Side or Summit Hill, Highland Park or the East Side, all of us benefit when we work together. Coordinated trash collection will lead to clean neighborhoods and consistent service for all residents of St. Paul, no exceptions."

Make a Plan for Action

*Adaptation questions: Who is with the neighbor taking action? (make sure to be race-forward)
How will collective action lead to a shared vision?*

- **(If they are voting YES)** I am hearing from a lot of folks in St. Paul that are planning to vote yes too! This is a first step toward making a path where families can be centered and not just dollar signs. All families, Black or white, rich or poor, Muslim or Christian, need and deserve good schools, livable wages, time to care for themselves and families, quality housing, and safe communities where we trust our neighbors and the people hired to protect us. Can I count on you to be a voter by Tuesday, November 5th?
- That's great - I wanted to double check that you know where your voting location is. It's_____.
- When do you think you'll vote? Before or after work?
- How will you get there?
- Is there anyone else in your household that you will vote with?

Thanks and Close

*Adaptation questions: How will their actions benefit them and others across race and place?
Who will be helped? (make sure to be race-forward)*

- Thank them for supporting a yes vote/engaging, and pass them the campaign literature.
- I believe that when St Paul votes YES we will be affirming that whether you are a homeowner, landlord, or renter, together we can keep making St Paul the city we all deserve.
- Have a good day/night.

Layering

Campaigns should use **multiple modes of communication** to reach their target audience.

Research shows that “layering” – the process of attempting to reach the same voters with several modes of communication over time – can be more effective than just using a single mode to contact a person.

Here’s an example of literature that ISAIAH used during the trash campaign when canvassing Muslim neighborhoods in St. Paul. It doesn’t include a villain statement, or much about past victories. If you are running a layered campaign, it takes pressure off of you as an organizer to include every part of the architecture when speaking, because you know you are reaching



As the Muslim community here in St. Paul, our voice matters and we are claiming it through the city council and school board elections coming up Tuesday, November 5th, 2019. There are thousands of Muslims in St. Paul and if we all vote together we can reshape politics in the city so that the issues we care about get on the table.

We believe whether we’re Black, white, Brown, together we can build a city that boldly leads us into the future! Instead of spending millions revisiting the issue of trash, let’s devote our time and collective resources towards the bold solutions we need on things like:

- ✓ Affordable Housing
- ✓ Addressing Climate Change
- ✓ Schools St. Paul Kids Deserve

Let’s commit to solving our city’s problems collectively and inclusively. Join us as we raise the voice of the Muslim community here in St. Paul and work together to win the big things we care about.

CLAIM YOUR VOICE AND VOTE!

Vote **YES** on the Residential Coordinated Collection ballot referendum.

#VoteYesForStPaul #VoteWithMe

your targets with more than one mode of communication.

Since the campaign knew that their canvassers could have conversations about the villains, they chose to lean in on **Values** and **Vision** in this literature:

- **Values:** “Our voice matters.”
- **Vision:** “Together we can build a city that boldly leads us into the future” and “Let’s devote our time and collective resources towards the bold solutions we need like affordable housing, addressing climate change, and schools St. Paul kids deserve.”
- **Call to Action:** “Vote yes for St. Paul.”

Every individual responds differently depending on the mode of communication, be that a door knock, text message, digital ad, or public event.

For instance, consider the following scenarios:

- Person A is often on Facebook, rendering them more receptive to digital advertising programs. However, they cannot be reached through canvassing efforts due to their residence in an apartment complex. So organizers plan a public event in the nearby park, and they promote it through digital advertising.
- Person B is willing to talk with canvassers in person, but always declines phone calls from unrecognized numbers. The organizers follow up

#VoteYesForStPaul

YOU CAN EARLY VOTE IN THIS ELECTION

Ramsey County Elections Office
90 Plato Blvd W #160
Sept 20th - Nov 4th Monday - Friday
8:00-4:30 p.m.

East St. Paul/ Lake Phalen
Arlington Hills Community Center
1200 Payne Ave (dates and times below)

Near Al-Ihsan
Como Streetcar Station
1224 Lexington Pkwy N
Oct. 29 - Nov. 1 Tuesday - Friday,
12 p.m. - 6 p.m.
Nov. 2 Saturday, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Nov. 4 Tuesday, 12 p.m. - 5 p.m.

Find your polling place for election day at
<https://pollfinder.sos.state.mn.us>

Learn more and pledge to vote at
isaiahmn.org/MCISTP19

ISAIAH MUSLIM COALITION OF ISAIAH

Prepared and paid for by ISAIAH
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isaiahmn.org

with texts, and learn this person will respond to text messages from a trusted organization.

By layering each mode on top of each other, you maximize your chances of reaching each person in ways that meet them where they are.

The trash collection campaign in St. Paul was one of the first times ISAIAH prioritized layered communications and establishing rapport was still essential because the opposition had people on edge. So during door-to-door outreach, canvassers had iPads to share the campaign video on doorsteps.



Transcript:

- I'm Minister JaNaé Bates, and I'm an eastsider near Phalen Park, and I want our city leaders to focus on the big issues facing St. Paul.
- **Values:** Because whether we're white, Black, or brown, we need affordable housing, big solutions for climate change, and schools St. Paul kids deserve.
- **Villains:** Instead, some people want us to spend lots of time and our city's money revisiting the issue of coordinated trash collection.
- **Victories:** I want to move forward together, focused on bold, collective solutions,

- **Vision:** ready to tackle the big issues before us, no matter how challenging it gets.
- **Call to Action:** That's why I will vote Yes for St. Paul to keep coordinated trash collection. Will you vote with me?

What canvassers found is that people would then say, "I saw your ad," and start repeating the overarching message unprompted. They didn't explicitly connect the words to the ad, instead they adapted it slightly to their unique perspective. Which is great, because then they were singing from the same songbook and more likely to repeat it!

In this way, layering different modes of communication together can help maximize the number of voters influenced by a program and ensure you are reaching voters where they spend their time.

Modes Follow Strategy

When deciding which modes to deploy, consider how they relate to your strategic goals and how far your dollars will likely go.

All modes of reaching your audience, whether canvassing, 1-on-1 conversations, or speaking with the press require training your team to sing from the same songbook. Without training, canvassers may get nervous and say whatever they think, or your executive director may act so confident that they go off script. Train your people to use your narrative and overarching message in each mode. Then the modes you choose will meet a clear strategic need.

Attributions

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