

Messaging & Narrative Guide: Protecting Immigrant Rights Under a Hostile Federal Administration

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Background / Purpose

The reality of a second Trump Administration is upon us. We know that Trump's unprecedented mass deportation and immigration detention agenda is a direct attack on our immigrant communities. It's also an attack on all of us and our freedoms; and we must speak out about it as such.

To win the narrative, we all need to align around a consistent overarching message. This messaging guide is intended to provide you with some different frameworks / angles that echo a common message: We are all stronger when we fight – together – for a society where *all* working families have a roof over their heads, high-quality healthcare, and life-sustaining jobs.

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Best Practices

Before you begin using these messages, please review the following best practices:

- **Lean into empathy- and strength-based arguments** rather than sympathy-based arguments. For example, we should be communicating that immigrants are resilient and strong, not vulnerable or victims.
- **Make affirmative demands.** NOT negative ones. When we negate something, we make it top of mind. The same goes for repeating opposition messaging.
 - It's often also strategic to hide the political message. For example, "stop the mass deportation machine" could be "we must keep families together."
- **Use the active voice.** For example, "our immigrant communities are being terrorized by this slew of inhumane policies" should be "the Trump administration and the billionaires who bought them are terrorizing our immigrant neighbors to distract from their own leadership failures and to pad their own pockets."
- **Do NOT pander to the opposition by using "moderate" messaging.** When we use "moderate" messaging, we persuade the opposition that they are right and we persuade the persuadables that the opposition is right. We must present a VERY clear contrast with the opposition to get persuadables on our side.
 - Our message must (1) activate our base; (2) convert persuadables; and (3) marginalize the opposition.
- **Repeat yourself over and over again.** Say the same thing; keep saying it; and get as many people as you can to say it too. This is how we win.

The Tried-and-True Messaging Formula for a Winning Narrative

Based on messaging research, behavioral studies, and polling, we know that the most effective messaging follows this tried-and-true structure:

1. **Values:** Lead with values shared broadly across our differences. Make the biggest possible "WE." Claim the moral high ground.
2. **Villain:** Name who created the problem and how it violates our shared value. Be specific and use the active voice.

3. **Vision:** Close with a vision for the future and how we can achieve it when we act together. Emphasize the importance of unity and collective action to solve the problem.

Core Message

1. **Values:** America's strength lies in how deeply interconnected our lives are with our neighbors, communities, friends, and families.
2. **Villain:** The one percent backed by Trump, Musk, and their billionaire buddies are trying to divide us by sowing fear and telling lies, all to pad their own pockets – goading us to fight amongst ourselves to distract us from their illegal power grabs.
3. **Vision:** We're not falling for it. We are all stronger when we fight – together – for a society where all working families have a roof over their heads, high-quality healthcare, and life-sustaining jobs.

Angles / Frameworks

All of the following angles / frameworks get us to the same place using slightly different messages. Before choosing your messaging, consider your audience. What do they care about? What's holding them back from agreeing with us? Who do they trust?

Corporate Greed

Trump's anti-immigrant agenda is about greed. This angle focuses on explicitly naming who benefits from Trump's agenda – greedy CEOs, corporate landlords, the ultra-wealthy, and their right-wing extremist allies. Consider the following messages:

Working families should be able to build safe and dignified lives with the people they love. Greedy CEOs, corporate landlords, and the ultra-wealthy are inflating your rent, jacking up your grocery bill, and taking away your healthcare. Right-wing extremists and their ultra-wealthy allies desperately want to make us all believe that immigrants are to blame. We cannot fall for their tactics and let them set us against one another for their own personal gain. We are all stronger when we fight – together – for a society where all working families have a roof over their heads, high-quality healthcare, and life-sustaining jobs.

Working families should be able to build safe and dignified lives with the people they love. Meanwhile, the Trump administration is threatening to cut federal funding from localities that have undertaken reasonable policy measures that make all of us safer. Why? It's the same reason they're trying to defund Medicaid – to pay for massive tax cuts for billionaires and large

corporations. We refuse to let Trump scare us into helping him carry out his anti-immigrant agenda. We are all stronger when we fight – together – for a society where all working families have a roof over their heads, high-quality healthcare, and life-sustaining jobs.

Undermine the Fear Mongering

We know that the purpose of Trump's harmful actions on immigration are to scare immigrants, keep them out of public life, and make it harder for them to access critical services. It's important that our messages don't exacerbate, and actually mitigate, this fear-mongering. Consider the following:

All of us want to feel safe in our communities. Trump is deliberately terrorizing and villainizing immigrant communities – isolating them from public spaces like schools and libraries, limiting their access to life-saving resources, and blaming them for the mess he made – in an attempt to sow fear, divide all of us, and distract us from his extreme power grabs and governing failures. Together, at the local level, we can fight back for a united community that stands strong against attacks on our neighbors, so that all of us can live, work, and play safely and with dignity.

Criminalization / Expansion of the Police State

Trump's mass deportation agenda fuels the expansion of the police state and thus perpetuates violence against Black and brown people and other communities. Consider the following message:

All of us want to feel safe in our communities. The Trump administration and the billionaires who bought them are deliberately over-policing and surveilling our communities – threatening the safety of *all* working people, especially our neighbors who have long been overpoliced. We refuse to submit to this president's brazen attempts to divide our communities and pit people against one another. We are all stronger when we fight – together – for a society where we can all live safely.

Protecting Working Families

Making immigrant workers fearful makes it easier for corporations to exploit all low-wage workers. Consider the following message:

Working families are struggling right now – whether our families have been here for generations or they've recently arrived. The Trump administration and its billionaire allies are intimidating immigrant workers to make it easier for corporations to exploit *all* of us. We refuse to submit to this president's brazen attempts to divide our communities and pit working-class people against one another. We are all stronger when we fight – together – for a society where all working families have life-sustaining jobs.

Combat Misinformation

Unfortunately, public support for the nebulous concept of “border security” remains quite high, as a result of the unrelenting negative coverage and blatant lies told about our border communities and the people who live there. We must set the record straight without repeating opposition narratives or making negative demands. Consider the following:

Whether you live in a big city, a small town, or a border community, immigrants are our friends, our neighbors, our colleagues, and our family. Trump and his billionaire allies are lying to us about border communities to distract from their own leadership failures and divide all of us. The reality is that the border is home to safe, thriving communities full of resilient people who care deeply for one another and their home. We are all stronger when we fight – together – for a society where we can all live safely.

Abundance / Unity

We know that the right’s anti-immigrant agenda is an attempt to divide working-class communities to (1) distract from their own leadership failures and (2) pad their own pockets. We must remind people that we are all stronger when we’re in solidarity with one another. Consider the following messages:

All of us came from somewhere. Unfortunately, the Trump Administration and their billionaire allies are blaming immigrants for the problems that *they* created to distract from their own leadership failures and pad their own pockets. The truth is, we have more than enough resources to support everyone – including newcomers – and we would have even more if these billionaires paid their fair share.

Every single one of us deserves the chance to build a full, vibrant life with the people we love. For too long, working families have been left behind while the ultra-wealthy continue to get richer and richer. We see people forced to live outside, families unable to put food on the table, and people having to work multiple jobs just to get by. Right-wing extremists and their ultra-wealthy allies desperately want people to believe that immigrants are to blame. We cannot fall into their trap meant to divide us. Only if we stay together, can we make sure every one of our neighbors – from the family that’s been here for generations to the one that just immigrated here – has quality, stable housing, good union jobs, and everything they need to thrive.

Call out the Authoritarian Playbook

What’s happening right now is textbook authoritarianism. We need to call it out, remind people of their humanity, and warn them that we’ve seen this before. Illinois Governor JB Pritzker has modeled this messaging quite well, as has Texas Congressman Greg Casar. Consider the following messages:

Every single one of us deserves the chance to build a full, vibrant life with the people we love. And I am certain that all of us know someone whose chance of this is being threatened by the Trump administration. Now let’s be clear – what’s happening right now is textbook authoritarian

playbook: They point to a group of people who don't look like you and tell you to blame them for your problems. I know I'm not alone when I ask: What comes next? After we've discriminated against, criminalized, deported or disparaged our immigrant neighbors, our queer and trans friends, people with disabilities, women and people of color. After that, when the problems we started with are still there staring us in the face – what comes next? All of the atrocities of human history lurk in the answer to that question. If we don't want to repeat history, then we better be strong enough to learn from it. We cannot submit to this president's brazen attempts to divide our communities and pit us against one another. We are all stronger when we fight – together – for a society where all of us have the chance to build a full, vibrant life with the people we love.

Every single one of us deserves the chance to build a full, vibrant life with the people we love. The Trump Administration and their big boss donors are using an old tactic here – find a vulnerable group of people and blame them for all of our issues. The truth is, they're blaming immigrants because they don't want the American people to see their plan to dismantle unions and NEVER raise wages for American workers. They're blaming immigrants because they don't want the American people to see their plan to take away affordable housing. They want to distract from the 8 million dollars a day that billionaires get from the federal government while they attack hardworking immigrants. We cannot submit to this president's brazen attempts to divide our communities and pit us against one another. We are all stronger when we fight – together – for a society where all of us have the chance to build a full, vibrant life with the people we love.

Responding to ICE Raids by Calling out the Authoritarian Playbook:

We believe in welcoming our neighbors, keeping families together, and that our strength comes from the deep interconnectedness of our communities to build thriving and safe communities. We are at an inflection point for our First Amendment right to protest, our freedoms, and our democracy. What is happening right now is textbook authoritarian playbook: raids designed to stoke and prey on fears, sow and manufacture chaos, and divide communities by scapegoating our immigrant communities. While this administration sows chaos by spending millions of dollars to deploy the military for exercising our First Amendment rights, they are also simultaneously trying to cut Medicaid and other health coverage, funding for our kids' schools, and programs like SNAP that help put groceries on the table. Local elected officials have been elected to govern, and we know how to keep our people safe. This federal overreach only serves to frighten and harm all of us. We will stand up to this bullying of our residents, students, and families and be prepared to highlight how this administration's actions are detrimental to our communities. We won't back down. We unequivocally stand in solidarity with our immigrant friends, neighbors, and family members.

Defending Sanctuary Policies

Background

The Trump administration continues to threaten sanctuary cities – mostly recently through [HR 32](#), a bill that would strip federal funding from states and localities to try to coerce them into aiding his mass deportation plan. We must message that these actions are attacks on ALL of our communities. See these [talking points](#) for more information about how to defend sanctuary cities from these baseless threats.

Oppose HR 32

All of our communities depend on essential federal funding to keep afloat. The Trump administration and its billionaire allies want to strip all of our communities of this critical funding simply for undertaking reasonable policy measures that make all of us safer. That means slashing funding for essential, life-saving programs. Why? To coerce us into helping Trump carry out his harmful anti-immigrant agenda and to pay for billionaire tax cuts. We will not let Trump hold our communities hostage. I will do everything in my power to protect my community – regardless of immigration status – but Congress must reject this detrimental legislation to protect all of us.

Defend Sanctuary Policies

All of us want to feel safe in our communities. The Trump Administration is threatening our welcoming communities and resorting to unlawful scare tactics because it knows that sanctuary policies WORK – they build trust in our essential public institutions like schools and hospitals, preserve our scarce local resources, and most important, they make our communities safer and stronger for all of us.

All of us want to feel safe in our communities. Meanwhile, the Trump Administration is fear mongering and lying – blaming welcoming cities for problems that he and his extremist allies have created. The truth is, welcoming policies make our cities safer. The data on this is abundantly clear: communities with welcoming policies are safer, have better health outcomes, more housing stability, stronger school attendance records, and a whole host of other positive outcomes compared to cities without welcoming policies.

All of us want to feel safe in our communities. But let's be clear: the Trump Administration and his billionaire allies don't care about our safety. They're taking away our healthcare, cutting our jobs, making our groceries more expensive, and driving our rent up. We know what makes us safe: stable housing, good education, affordable food, high-quality healthcare, life sustaining jobs. If the Trump Administration really cared about our safety, they would invest in these life-saving services, rather than attacking the cities that are doing just that.

How to Respond to a Raid in Your Community

Some of us may experience ICE raids in our community. In the awful event that this happens, it's critically important to remember that **a strategic communications response can save lives, bring order to the disorder, move people into action, and win the moment.** This section will focus on

how local leaders can respond publicly after an immigration raid in their community – i.e. talking to reporters, posting on social media, releasing statements, etc. Please note that this is *not* a one-size-fits-all guide, as every community has different local context and concerns. Rather, the following are simply approaches for you to consider. For legal / policy guidance after a raid, please email helpdesk@localprogress.org, and we can send you an internal guide.

Before the Raid

- **Build your rapid response group.** In order to have a coordinated, unified communications response when a raid occurs, you need to have your group prepped and ready far before. Identify and convene a group of values-aligned professionals or volunteers in legal, advocacy, organizing, and communications spaces in your community. Bring the group together to hash out any inherent conflicts existing between these teams, share contact information, and build relationships.
- **Build media relationships.** When a raid happens, you want reporters / news outlets to turn to YOU as a source of information. This requires relationship building far before a raid occurs. It is unlikely that you have local journalists in your community who exclusively cover immigration – most reporters are covering it from a government, crime, or politics beat. That means that journalists are hungry for framing and information about how to cover it; in other words, there is a lot of opportunity for reporter education. Reach out to values-aligned journalists covering these beats, build relationships, and help them see you as a trusted source.

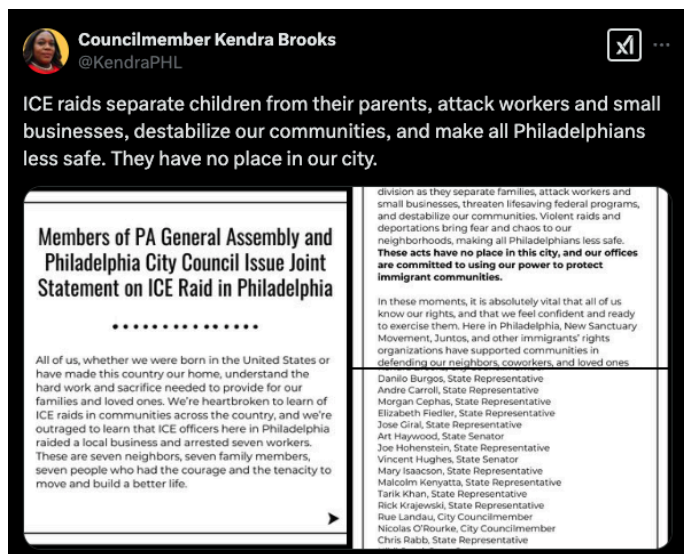
During / After the Raid

1. **Follow the lead of leaders within the affected community** to help guide your advocacy work in a way that centers their needs. Align around shared strategic goals – these are often: (1) stop the deportation of people arrested; (2) build local support; (3) increase political costs of ICE enforcement; and (4) wedge the opposition's coalition.
2. **Engage in a coordinated, unified response to meet the moment and build local power.** A unified response can change public opinion, wedge the opposition, kickstart national action, and even stop the raid. Legal, organizing, advocacy and communications must be unified around the shared goals you set together. **This requires having folks in these spaces – whether in a professional or volunteer capacity – prepped and ready to engage on a moment's notice before a raid occurs.** Use the crisis to build local power by deepening these relationships and strengthening local infrastructure that will outlast the crisis.
3. **Make a strategic communications plan that frames the narrative immediately from a human perspective.** ICE is unfortunately quite good at framing the narrative quickly around the story they want to tell. They embed reporters in sweeps / raids – doing

everything in their power to diminish the human impact and focus on law and order. We must quickly elevate the **human impact of the story** and create a stark contrast between families being torn apart and ICE criminalizing our neighbors. **Center compassion – this is the message that moves people, regardless of political orientation.**

- a. **Consider the narrative** – what is the story you want to tell? Center the human impact. Center compassion.
 - b. **Draft simple talking points** – what messages get you from the current narrative to the desired narrative? Decide on one, single, unified, repeated message.
 - c. **Choose messengers** – who should this message come from (i.e. a faith leader or a local business owner)? Make sure you're training these folks so that they stay on message and understand the ethical considerations at stake.
 - d. **Designate a media contact** – and make sure all inquiries go through this person to ensure quick responses and streamlined coordination. They should know to (1) only respond to inquiries from friendly reporters; (2) set guardrails with reporters, especially when speaking to impacted communities; and (3) make the reporters job as easy as possible to tell the story we want to tell.
 - e. **Identify key media outlets** – which reporters will do your story justice? Who does the community trust? Have a press list of friendly reporters and their contact information ready to go before a raid occurs. Send them an email and / or a brief statement condemning what happened from a human perspective, sharing your plan, and affirming your values.
 - f. **Engage in content creation** – don't wait for coverage! The rise of digital media has changed the game. Make your own content using social media, blog posts, emails, etc. Capture ethical photos and photos.
4. **Capitalize on the ripple effect stories have.** Stories have the power to go from the hyper local level to the systems level: affected workers → affected families → community impacts → regional / state impacts → economic / political impacts. If you get a great local story about the impact on affected workers, post it on social media and share it with reporters who might consider writing about the affected families, and so on. Check out this [New York Times story](#) and this [New Yorker article](#) for good examples of more systems-level stories about a hyper-local raid.

Examples – Speaking to Values after a Raid



[Jamie Gauthier](#) after an [ICE raid in Philly](#)

[Kendra Brooks](#) after an [ICE raid in Philly](#)

[Mayor Ras Baraka](#) after an [ICE raid in Newark](#)

[Crystal Murillo](#) after an [ICE raid in Aurora](#)

[Eunissess Hernandez](#) after a raid in LA

Resources

Here are some additional LP immigration communications resources that may be useful:

- [Talking points](#) on the importance of **sanctuary policies**
- [Messaging guide](#) for talking about **new arrivals**

This messaging guide was created and compiled with the help of existing communications resources from our LP, our partners, and our allies. Check them out below:

- [Messaging Guidance to Challenge the Detention, Deportation and Criminalization of Immigrants](#)
- LP's [Communications Tools & Guides](#)
- LP's [Messaging Guide: Supporting New Arrivals](#)
- [Progressive Playbook: Immigration](#)
- ASO Communications' [Here to Stay: How to Talk About the Authoritarian Agenda on Immigration](#)
- Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition and National Immigration Law Center's [Lessons from East Tennessee: A Toolkit for Organizations Responding to Mass Worksite Immigration Raids](#)