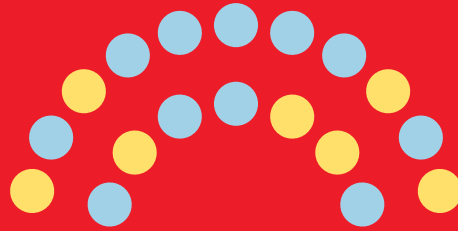
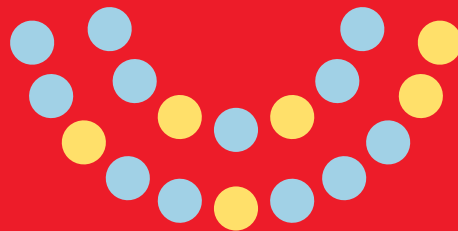


BetterTogetherCanada.ca



# We're Better Together



## Message Guide

Building Public Support for Immigrants and Refugees

This Message Guide was created to help advocates grow public support for immigrants and refugees by centering shared values in how we talk about newcomers. It is a key resource for We're Better Together – a multi-year campaign, led by the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) and partners, to build our movements' success in increasing public support for immigrants and refugees. With consistent and persuasive messaging, together we can grow momentum for building a fair and welcoming immigration system. To join the campaign as a signatory, [please fill out this form](#).

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# Introduction to the Message Guide

## What is the purpose of this guide?

This Message Guide is intended to help you create and share messaging that will win over Canadian public opinion in support of immigrants and refugees. The messaging proposed is backed by research commissioned by the Canadian Council for Refugees on how to communicate persuasively on this theme to audiences in Canada.

## What is our goal for this campaign?

This campaign aims to grow public support for immigrants and refugees in Canada, which will make policy victories for a fair and welcoming immigration system more achievable.

## Who can use this messaging – and where and how do we use it?

Both individuals and organizations can use this Message Guide in any medium – whether posting on social media, preparing to speak to a friend or family member, or writing newsletters and press releases. If you use this guide to help create a new resource for your own organization, please cite the Canadian Council for Refugees and link this document in your sources.



# Key Messages

## Why is it so important to use the key messages?

One of the most effective ways to convey unity and “cut through the noise” is through consistency and message repetition. The idea is to keep things simple, emotive, and memorable enough that the audience can then carry your messages forward.

Practice these key messages by weaving them into your campaigning and your everyday work related to immigrants and refugees.

- In Canada [and in Quebec], we speak many languages, come from many places, and across our differences, we look out for each other.
- While politicians abroad spread lies to turn neighbour against neighbour, in Canada we reject those who use divide and conquer tactics to distract us while chipping away at the healthcare and services we all need and letting housing prices spiral.
- We are proud to be a country that welcomes newcomers, and we expect our leaders to carry on that legacy and make this a place where all families can thrive. In Canada [and Quebec], we know we're better off together. **Close by adding a specific call to action: the next step that you want your audience to take, or where to connect and learn more.**

**Note:** If you are in Quebec, you can say “in Canada and in Quebec” or just “in Quebec.” If you are working at the local level, you can tailor it to your area by saying “in Halifax” or “in Sudbury”.



# Messaging Framework

This framework provides a three-step format for writing persuasive messaging when communicating about immigrants and refugees.

Step:	How to approach it:	Why it's important:
<b>Emotional hook grounded in shared values</b>	Messages are most persuasive when they start with an “emotional hook” – an emotive sentence grounded in shared values related to being welcoming to everyone across our differences.	This approach grabs your audience’s attention while anchoring your message in shared values like love, freedom, and family, to connect with people’s own beliefs and foster empathy.
<b>Name the “villains” and the harms they are causing</b>	Name who is at fault: politicians and other leaders who blame immigrants and refugees to distract us from the real causes of problems that have been decades in the making like the housing crisis, youth under-employment, or long wait times in healthcare. It is important to name the culprits causing economic harm and their motivation to blame newcomers.	When we name who is responsible for these issues, it shows that immigrants and refugees are not at fault, and shares the truth that these problems flow from decisions that we can reverse. Moreover, as Canadians face challenges related to the Trump administration, our research showed that people are moved by messages that reject division and call for what all Canadians need, like healthcare and housing.
<b>Solution, vision, and call to action</b>	Lay out a vision for the future that provides a solution to the issue of division, and reaffirms our shared values grounded in “being Canadian” and being welcoming. The vision should include safety, justice, and prosperity for everyone. <b>Close by adding a specific call to action (with link) that you want your audience to take.</b>	Highlighting your vision of the future gives your audience hope and motivates them to support your cause. Further, including a call to action gives your audience a way to channel the energy you have sparked with your messaging into action, and deepen their connection to your organisation or campaign.

*To see an example of this messaging framework in use, refer to the “Key Messages” section above.*



# Best Practices for Persuasive Messaging

Use the following guidance to create persuasive messaging:

- Start messages with shared values and an emotional hook
- Repeat the same key messaging consistently
- Use concise, clear, and accessible language: avoid academic terms, sector acronyms, or jargon
- Be culturally sensitive and inclusive
- Foster hope by highlighting victories achieved through collective action
- When possible, be patient when someone expresses something negative about immigrants and/or refugees
- Get comfortable alienating the opposition (anti-newcomer voices and groups) by being clear and bold in your stance
- Use active verbs to describe how problems are deliberately created



# Words that Work: How to Replace Ineffective Messaging



## Instead of:

## Say this:

Our opponents are anti-immigrant	Our opponents blame and shame immigrants, trying to distract us from the real culprits who are failing to ensure we all have access to housing and healthcare
These policies are racist	Certain politicians point the finger at newcomers – as a way to divide our communities. We need leaders who help everyone in Canada thrive, rather than pitting communities against each other.
It is not illegal to seek asylum <i>Reminding people what refugees are not (i.e. “not illegal”) makes them remember the words “refugee” and “illegal” in a negative frame.</i>	We all want our loved ones to be safe – and that is why seeking asylum is an issue of basic rights, and central to human dignity. When people cross borders, their human rights come with them.
Family separation; separating families	Taking a child from his/her mom/dad/parent(s). Taking children from their parents.
It is Canada’s responsibility to help newcomers and accept refugees <i>Our research showed that messages on Canada’s “responsibility” were less persuasive.</i>	Working together across our differences, we can build a future where everyone can thrive.
Fix our broken system; stop detentions	Ensuring the well-being of families is what matters most. We need fair immigration processes that assess each person’s case.



## Instead of:



## Say this:



<p>Canada must comply with international human rights law and our humanitarian and legal obligations</p> <p><i>Our research showed that messages on Canada's "obligations" were less persuasive</i></p>	<p>Here in Canada, we need to treat others the way we want to be treated, so that families can be safe and everyone can thrive.</p>
<p>Refugees are fleeing persecution, violence, and torture</p>	<p>Refugees are seeking safety / rebuilding their lives where it's safe / looking to find a safe home</p>
<p>Immigrants and refugees have a right to access services</p>	<p>Everyone deserves the support they need to thrive.</p>
<p>Injustices are being perpetrated on refugees</p> <p><i>This example is in the passive voice and does not clearly name who is at fault</i></p>	<p>The Government chooses to detain people.</p> <p><b>[Name]</b> decided to deny rights.</p> <p><i>This example names who committed the issue</i></p>
<p>People crossing our border</p>	<p>People entering our country.</p>
<p>This is an unprecedented crisis; these are massive human rights violations</p>	<p>Separating families and abusing children is a choice we don't need to keep making.</p>



# Avoiding Ineffective Messaging

Our research showed that the following approaches are not persuasive.

## “Open door” messaging

Broadly speaking, Canadians identify with pro-immigration messaging. However, our research shows that using “open door” or obligation language on immigration puts a limit on public support, rather than increasing it.

### ❌ Example:

“Canada must welcome displaced people, regardless of where they come from”.

### ✅ Instead:

Highlight Canada’s welcoming legacy and our shared commitment to building a future where we can all thrive.

## “Status quo” messaging

As part of the research, we tested audiences on a message that resembles how nonprofits and experts often speak about the immigrants and refugees, typically leaning on “insider” language, due process, obligations, and legal rights. We call this status quo messaging and it often lacks an emotional appeal.

### ❌ Example:

“We have the obligation, both legally and morally, to generously provide for those escaping violence. With some key adjustments to existing resources, we can see to it that refugees are looked after and properly equipped for success.”

*While this message is factually correct, it is not as persuasive because it is too technical and lacks an emotional connection.*

### ✅ Instead:

Use the messaging framework provided in this document to create persuasive messaging your audience can relate to.

# How to Respond to Negative Messages About Immigrants and Refugees

**Tip:** Don't repeat hateful or misinformed messages when you are arguing against them. That unintentionally reinforces those messages.

If we tell you to not think of an elephant, what are you thinking about now?<sup>1</sup> Statements like 'refugees are not terrorists' or 'migrant workers are not taking your jobs' mistakenly reinforce the negative information. Instead of repeating the negative information while arguing against it, practice centering the campaign key messaging in your response.

## ➡ Example of a negative comment:

"We have enough problems already in Canada without letting in more immigrants and refugees. There are too many people putting a strain on our public services and causing rising unemployment. We need to address the needs of Canadians before we let more people come."

## ✗ Example of an ineffective response that repeats the negative comment:

"Sure — it can cost money to support refugees. They deserve a significant financial investment because they have gone through a dangerous time. It's their right".

*This response repeats the negative comment and does not adequately respond to the original statement's claim around strain on public services. It is important for an effective response to address the commenter's concerns while also affirming the need to support immigrants and refugees.*

## ✓ Example of an effective response:

"Everyone in Canada deserves a decent job, affordable housing, and a good life for their family. It's true that times are tough for Canadians. But immigrants and refugees are an important part of our communities and economy. In fact, many public services — like healthcare — rely on immigrants to function. Canada has a proud history of helping those in need, and welcoming folks from around the world to find their homes and build their lives here. Solving our problems can only be done when we all work together."

1 Lakoff, George. The All New Don't Think of an Elephant!: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate. Chelsea Green Publishing, 2014.

➤ **Example of a negative comment:**

“People who come to Canada from other countries don’t behave like we do — and they aren’t interested in assimilating and becoming a part of our communities.”

✗ **Example of an ineffective response:**

“There’s no reason for newcomers to assimilate when they move to Canada. Newcomers do want to be part of our communities — but it’s just hard for them.”

*This response repeats the negative frame, by linking newcomers to the “need to assimilate” and emphasizing them as separate from local communities. This response also fails to provide positive messaging about newcomers being a vital part of our communities.*

✓ **Example of an effective response:**

“Whether you grew up here, or whether you moved here, we all know that community is important. Newcomers make our communities stronger and more diverse — which helps all of us thrive.”

➤ **Example of a negative comment:**

“They’re changing this country!”

✗ **Example of an ineffective response:**

“That’s a disgusting / racist thing for you to say.”

*This is a reactionary response that will not win audiences over to our side. An effective response will speak to the real problems facing Canadians, and identify culprits while generating connection and empathy.*

✓ **Example of an effective response:**

“Change can be scary. And you know what scares me? Politicians, like we see in the US, turning neighbours against each other, pointing the fingers at newcomers looking for a fair shot instead of tackling the real problems we share, like the cost of living crisis. I’m proud to be Canadian, and in Canada, we look out for each other, and ensure that all of us can thrive.”

➤ **Example of a negative comment:**

“There are too many new immigrants and they make housing way more expensive! It’s now impossible for my son to buy his first house.”

✗ **Example of an ineffective response:**

“No, there are not too many refugees here, we need more! And refugees don’t make housing more expensive.”

*In trying to refute each component of the negative message, this response repeats and amplifies the negative frame. This approach is not persuasive.*

✓ **Example of an effective response:**

“I know you love your son so much, right? Whether we were born here or moved from elsewhere, we all want the best for our families. And while politicians abroad spread lies to turn neighbour against neighbour, here in Canada we are proud to be a country that welcomes immigrants, and ensures wellbeing for all. We reject leaders who point the finger at immigrants for our struggles to distract us while chipping away at the healthcare and services we all need and letting housing prices spiral. We expect our leaders to make this a place where all families can thrive because in Canada, we know we’re better off together.”



# Countering Incorrect Information

If you need to directly counter misinformation, try a “truth sandwich” approach.<sup>1</sup> This allows you to centre the persuasive key messaging, while also countering misinformation with facts.

- Start with your key messaging
- Briefly counter the misinformation
- Close with your key messaging



**Example incorrect statement:** “Canada let in twice as many refugees than any other country last year.”

**Response with the sandwich method:** “Here in Canada, we speak many languages, come from many places, and across our differences, we look out for each other — and we know that Canada has a legacy of being welcoming. I’ve heard that Canada is not even in the top few countries in terms of who admits the most refugees, and I’d be happy to share that data with you.<sup>2</sup> And as we’ve been hearing on the news lately, there are politicians abroad trying to pit neighbour against neighbour — it makes it easy to get distracted from issues like housing prices skyrocketing and the cost of living. What do you think about that?”

## How to Tailor Messaging to Align With Your Organization’s Focus Area

Many organizations that support this campaign may want to tailor the messaging to connect it to their organization’s specific area of focus. At the same time, it is also crucial to have consistency in the messaging, so while you can make tweaks to tie in your issue, ensure you retain a fundamental similarity with the campaign key messaging.

### Steps to tailoring the messaging:

- Copy and paste the key messages
- Copy and paste the messaging framework to keep the structure as a reference
- Make edits to the key messages by adding references to your organization’s focus area, while ensuring that most of original messages remain



<sup>1</sup> “How to Make a ‘Truth Sandwich.’” CNN, Cable News Network, 17 June 2018, [edition.cnn.com/videos/tv/2018/06/17/how-to-make-a-truth-sandwich-rs.cnn](https://edition.cnn.com/videos/tv/2018/06/17/how-to-make-a-truth-sandwich-rs.cnn).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “Refugee Data Finder.” UNHCR, [www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics](http://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics).



## Example tailoring the key messages to focus on migrant workers:

1. In Canada [and in Quebec], we speak many languages, come from many places, and across our differences, we look out for one another. This is true whether our families arrived here 100 years ago or 100 days ago.
2. We've all seen politicians abroad spread lies to turn neighbour against neighbour. Now, some leaders at home use those same divide-and-conquer tactics to blame migrant workers and distract us from demanding action on the housing crisis and the high cost of living, while letting too many workers endure endless abuse and poverty wages.
3. Migrant workers are important members of our communities and perform essential work in many industries – from putting food on our table to caring for our loved ones in hospitals and long-term care facilities. We are proud to be a country that welcomes newcomers and treats workers fairly, and we expect our leaders to carry on that legacy and make this a place where workers' rights are respected and all families can thrive. In Canada [and in Quebec], we know that looking out for each other makes us stronger. **Take action today to support a fair process for everyone by signing the letter linked here.**



# Why Using This Guide is Important

Canadians are reluctant to openly align with strongly anti-immigrant messages. More Canadians support than oppose immigration and believe in the positive role of immigrants in Canadian society (66% versus 20%). Our research also showed that when polled, 1 in 5 Canadians wants to be contacted to get involved in welcoming immigrants and refugees into their communities. **Using this guide will help your audiences find and use their voice in support of newcomers and Canadians alike. Together, we will speak up for a welcoming future for Canada.**

## About this Guide

This Message Guide has been developed by the Canadian Council for Refugees and LeBlanc (& co.) Communications. We are deeply grateful to have collaborated with Anat Shenker-Osorio and the team at ASO Communications, who led the messaging research and analysis phase of this project. This research and their insights have informed this Message Guide.

The research was conducted in English and French in July 2025 by ASO Communications, Keith Neuman, EKOS Research, and the Canadian Council for Refugees, reaching over 2,000 people from all across Canada. The results were used to tailor the messaging and narrative guidance to a Canadian audience with a shared basis of values.

The approach in this guide is rooted in the Race Class Gender Narrative – “a proven, research-backed messaging and organizing framework that weaves together race, class, and gender in order to advance our progressive worldview, and counter right-wing divide and conquer tactics.” For more information about that research, visit [\*\*We Make the Future\*\*](#)’s page on the history of the project and find additional Race Class Gender Narrative research on the [\*\*project resources page\*\*](#).

# Additional Resources for Further Reading

[Race Class Gender Narrative Messaging Template](#)

[Winning with the Race Class Narrative](#)

[2025 NARRATIVE GUIDE FOR IMMIGRANT FUTURES: How To Create Narrative Interventions That Counter Fear and Change Attitudes](#)

[Words that Work: Making the best case for people seeking asylum](#)

## References

Lakoff, George. *The All New Don't Think of an Elephant!:* Know Your Values and Frame the Debate. Chelsea Green Publishing, 2014.

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