

# Rise Above Tool Kit: Countering Messages of Fear and Division

Telling the real stories about community,  
diversity, and our shared future

In Partnership with



# In This Tool Kit

- INTRODUCTION** ..... 3
- MESSAGING FOR CHANGE**..... 4
  - The Power of Narrative ..... 4
  - Three Core Themes to the Rise Above Narrative ..... 4
    - Strength in Diversity..... 5
    - The Real American Story: Shared Values ..... 7
    - Solving Problems Together ..... 9
  - Audience Considerations..... 11
  - Promoting a Narrative..... 13
  - Building a Message..... 15
- GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT** ..... 18
  - Writing an Op-Ed..... 18
  - Letters to the Editor and Online Comments ..... 18
  - Sample News Story..... 19
  - Social Media ..... 20
- EXERCISES** ..... 22
  - Exercise 1: Rising Above in Community Forums..... 22
  - Exercise 2: Countering Fear-Based Messaging ..... 23
  - Exercise 3: Local Media Exercise ..... 24
  - Exercise 4: Rising Above in Campaigns..... 24
  - Exercise 5: Rising Above in Social Media ..... 24

## INTRODUCTION

UnidosUS 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 signals our America is a work in progress that calls for collaboration and agency to ensure our reality matches our ideals.

One of our country’s greatest assets is the strength of our diversity, which has helped us innovate to solve problems, avoid cultural stagnation, and better navigate a complex world. However, divisive rhetoric has grown louder in recent years, with extreme voices inciting Americans to mistrust each other, and pushing forward policies to solidify that mistrust and its detrimental consequences into law, threatening our values and rights. Issues such as immigration, religion, and crime, among others, 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.

Rise Above 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 campaign to help build and embrace an accurate **“Story of Us”** — a story 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 write a common melody that elevates the ideal America represents, ignites problem solving, and crystallizes the value and goals of the specific issues each of us works on. This tool kit provides the results of our research, and a practical guide to apply them.

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.

# MESSAGING FOR CHANGE

## The Power of Narrative

Social justice communications do not always do a good job of telling a big story. Instead, we often focus on short-term wins or on imparting pieces of information or statistics with no contextual framework or supporting persuasive arguments attached. However, history shows that to be effective in moving hearts, minds, and policy over the long term, we need to frame messages within strong, values-based narratives that can transform the larger conversation, shift culture, and result in lasting change.

A narrative is a set of broad themes and values that helps to connect with persuadable audiences and build support for change. Anti-immigrant spokespeople, for example, have a clear narrative with two main elements: that immigrants are a threat to *law and order* and that they *overwhelm scarce resources* such as health care, education, and employment. And even though the majority of Americans do not necessarily agree with that notion, constant use of that narrative has allowed it to become pervasive in the media and to shape negative policies that do little to address the need for modernizing our immigration system while much to simply produce a scapegoat.

We have the power to shape the narrative in our own time – with a honed strategy, an understanding of the audiences we want to move, and a diverse coalition of voices.

To ensure that the Rise Above narrative could successfully counter the negative drumbeat of fear-based messages we're all too familiar with, the development process was guided by three intertwined, but independently crucial, pieces of information gathering. These included discussion groups with the UnidosUS network of community-based organizations, a media review, and targeted public opinion research.<sup>1</sup> The outcomes of which pointed toward a set of messages that form a narrative about community, diversity, and our shared future.

## Three Core Themes to the Rise Above Narrative

- Strength in Diversity
- Shared Values: Respect and Dignity
- Solving Problems Together

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<sup>1</sup> Research 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 Black people 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 Blacks, 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.

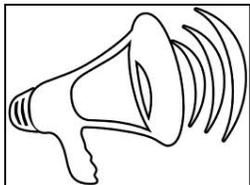
## Strength in Diversity

This pillar emphasizes that we are stronger when we include people of diverse backgrounds, beliefs and experiences in the conversation. By listening to diverse perspectives, we have more solutions and choices to consider, and are stronger as a country. You can also use this theme to emphasize the cultural benefits diversity provides with more culinary, artistic, and cultural traditions to experience. By emphasizing community and our shared interests, we discredit the “us vs. them” distinctions.

## Themes to Emphasize

- Connect diversity to problem solving. We should take advantage of all of the perspectives and experiences we already have in our country.
- All kinds of Americans contribute to our success. Diversity of backgrounds, cultures, experiences, and knowledge is a uniquely American strength.
- Everyone’s economic, cultural and political contributions, including those of immigrants and refugees are central to our past and our future success.
- We are a strong country because we are diverse.
- We can’t move forward together if we allow racism or intolerance to inform any of our approaches. That limits diverse contributions and violates our values.
- Call out attempts to divide us. We can’t fall prey to politicians who propose divisive policies and play into our fear. That makes us weaker.

## Talking Point Examples



- *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.*
- *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.*
- *When I think about our community, I think about how amazing it is that such a diverse group of people co-exists and, more than that, thrive together. We do this because of, not in spite of, our diversity. To be sure, we are often challenged. Sometimes when things are hard, some people try to find scapegoats, try to point out how we’re different from each other, try to figure out who to exclude from opportunity, from the future. But most of us look*

*around and see the potential in cooperation, in diverse voices—of the young, the old, those who were born here, those who have come from around the country and around the world, the working folks, and the professionals. We understand that we’re all stronger when we all have a voice and a chance to contribute and participate.*

- *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 of differences, on the fear of our diversifying population, 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 when we see it.*

## **Your Story of Strength in Diversity:**

What elements of diversity will you emphasize? How can you connect your issue to the larger theme of diversity? Circle the phrases and words above that work for you. Add your own stories, statistics, and examples below.

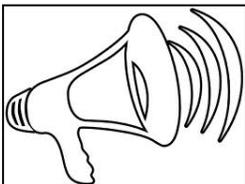
# The Real American Story: Shared Values

We need to define the story of America as the story of all of us. We are diverse in background, race, ethnicity, and experience (and we are better for that), but we do share certain foundational values: equality, respect, and dignity. Being American is not based on how we look or sound, or where we come from, but rather how we treat each other, and the values we share.

## Themes to Emphasize

- Make a strong and aspirational appeal to our foundational values: equality and opportunity, and to how we should all treat each other: with dignity and respect.
- Define American values on our terms: how we treat those who are different from us.
- Link our strength as a country to ensuring everyone has dignity and respect, with a strong call to action and unity.
- Embrace our values as a means to improve as a country. When we return to our strong values of equality and opportunity, of treating people with dignity and respect, and to appreciating diversity, we will be stronger.
- 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/or what their race is.
- Frame intolerance and hatred as principles that are taught, and that we can undo by working together and getting to know each other.

## Talking Point Examples



- *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.*
- *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.*
- *We all want our kids to learn to treat others with respect and dignity, and we want our leaders to lead by example through being their best selves. If we all join together to interrupt hate and racism when we see it, we can flush out the prejudice that still exists in many of our institutions.*
- *As Americans, we value our freedom. It's the first thing our founders protected -the freedom to practice our individual religion, to express ourselves freely, and to join together in our communities. Freedom exists when we respect each other and allow that we can disagree. It is our shared values, and our respect for our differences in our ability to work together to face our challenges, that makes us exceptional. As a country, we need to challenge ourselves to respect people who are different from us and from different cultures by thinking about their perspective. You can never really understand a person until you have walked in their shoes. When we respect each other, we strengthen our own freedom and our own opportunity to thrive.*

- *A healthy society is a place where people appreciate and welcome each other's differences, treat each other with respect, and care about everybody's freedom, no matter what they look like or where they come from. When we allow fear to poison society, spreading hate and division, we threaten the health of our communities and our country. The fear that drives some to call for treating Americans differently because of their religion or ethnicity threatens the freedom of all of us. The calls to ban refugees or separate families through mass raids and deportations ignores America's legacy as a beacon of liberty in the world. We can help mend these wounds by joining together and standing up for respect, dignity, and freedom for all.*

## Your Story of Shared Values:

Which shared values will you emphasize? How can you connect your issue to the larger themes of foundational values? Circle the phrases and words above that work for you. Add your own stories, statistics, and examples below.

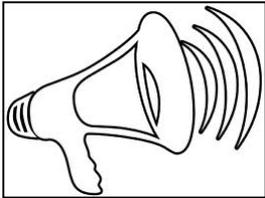
## Solving Problems Together

This pillar emphasizes that we are stronger when we bring to the table all of our diverse backgrounds, beliefs and experiences. With more perspectives, we have more solutions and more choices, and are stronger as a country. This pillar also emphasizes community and our shared interests when tackling problems and discrediting “us vs. them” distinctions.

### Themes to Emphasize

- Two heads are better than one; when we invite more voices and perspectives to participate, we’ll come up with better solutions.
- We’re missing out on critical perspectives, skills, and knowledge bases when we marginalize and exclude people.
- We all benefit when everyone can contribute their ideas, experiences, skills, and knowledge to our problem solving spaces.

### Talking Point Examples



- *When it comes to our country’s success and our shared future, we are in this together. We’re connected, and what happens to one group affects us all. That means we all have a stake in each other’s success, so we should work together to solve the problems in front of us. Together, we can get back on track.*
- *Our politicians need to learn what businesses in this country have understood for decades: diversity is a strength when it comes to innovation and problem solving. Bringing together people with different knowledge bases, experiences, and backgrounds brings more possibilities. Diversity is one of our country’s built-in strengths; we should build on it, not let politicians and others play on our fears to divide us and manufacture reasons to exclude people from our communities.*
- *We have a lot of work to do in this country to make sure everyone has the opportunity to succeed. We need to make sure people have access to good jobs, healthcare, and education. And we have to make sure that everyone here, regardless of what they look like or where they were born has access to those things so that we all have the tools we need to succeed, to contribute, and to participate. That means making sure people of all walks of life, races, religions, and backgrounds are included in decision-making and problem solving. We’re stronger when we work together with the common goal of our country’s success.*

## Your Problem Solving Themes:

Which themes about coming together to solve problems will you emphasize? How can you connect your issue to the larger themes? Circle the phrases and words above that work for you. Add your own stories, statistics, and examples below.

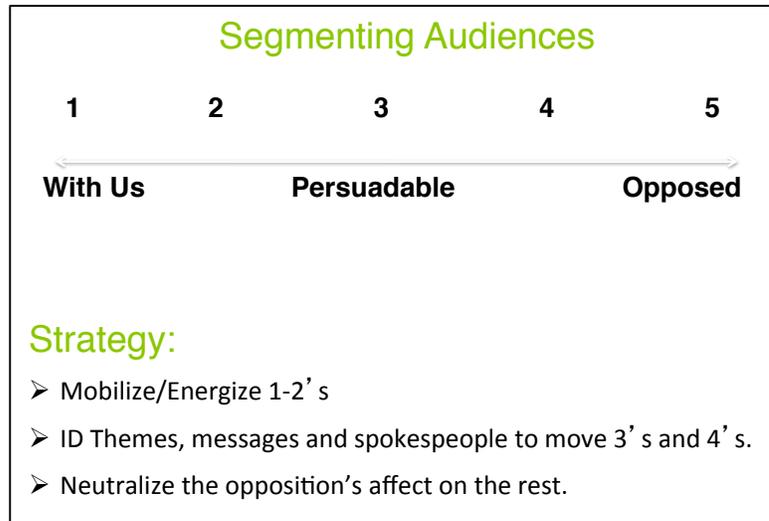
A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their responses to the prompts above. The box is currently blank.

# Audience Considerations

In any communications strategy, knowing the audience you are hoping to influence is crucial. Each message should be tailored to that specific audience’s needs. A narrative can span several audiences, by using different vocabulary and speaking points but conveying the same general themes. For instance, anti-immigrant spokespeople will emphasize overcrowded schools and emergency rooms when talking to some audiences, but they may allege that immigrants hurt low-wage workers or even the environment when speaking to certain progressive audiences. They are still operating under the same “scarce resources” theme, though, and are not creating an entirely new narrative strategy for each audience. Instead, they are tailoring their messages.

For the Rise Above narrative, a focus on strength in diversity, respect and dignity, and problem solving, should guide all of our messages, but you will likely use a different tone and vocabulary depending on your audience.

One helpful way to think about audiences is to use a scale from 1 to 5, with the 1s being the most sympathetic and activated, and the 5s the most hostile and activated against your cause. Now segment—who are the 2s and 3s? How can you reach them? And how can you motivate the 1s to action? This is not an ideological nor a partisan scale, as folks who are “with us” span those dimensions, as do our opposition. There are some demographic tendencies within each group, as noted below, but the groups are not wholly comprised of their demographic groups. What they universally share within their group are attitudes about diversity and inclusion.



## Audience Segments

**Base.** These are the folks who are already “with us,” but need engagement to stay motivated and active. In this study, the base comprised 33% of voters. They:

- Strongly embrace diversity.
- Believe it helps us solve problems.
- Believe discrimination towards many groups is a very serious problem.
- See a strong role for government in ensuring everyone has opportunity.
- Are more likely to be women, younger, Democratic, and Black.

**Persuadables.** These are audiences that could be with you with the right appeal to their core values. It’s important that your messages to these groups serve both short- and long- term goals. Ideally, you want to bring them along for the long haul, not just on one specific campaign. This research group comprised 50% of voters, and:

- Demonstrated attitudes that overlap with both base and opposition.
- Generally reflect characteristics of registered voters.
- Are slightly more likely to be Latino.

**Opposition.** This group is highly unlikely to be inspired to join us. Our strategy should be to neutralize the effect they have on persuadable audiences. By and large, we should not spend resources trying to influence this group. For this project, opposition audiences comprised 17% of voters. They:

- Are either ambivalent or against diversity.
- Believe government assistance has created a culture of dependency.
- Believe minorities use racism as an excuse for their own failures.
- Are more likely to be male, older, White, from the South, and Republican.

## Your Strategic Audiences

Take a moment to think about who your strategic audiences are. We don't have to speak to everyone out there, but rather need to tailor the larger narrative themes to each of our audiences in a way that they can hear and appreciate.

**Who do you need to influence (the more specifically you can describe them, the better)? Where do they rank on the 1-5 scale? Name two to three.**

**What values do you share with them?**

**What do you need them to do?**

**Which of the Rise Above messages/themes might work best to persuade this/these audience(s)?**

## Promoting a Narrative

Experience and research suggest that successful narratives share a few common elements. They should:

- Lead with shared values.
- Describe problems, but also point audiences toward clear solutions.
- Tell a Systemic Story.
- Tell an affirmative story: avoid myth busting.
- Build a values-based message.

**Lead with Shared Values** - Communications research shows that audiences are more receptive to unfamiliar arguments when they are framed by shared values. If we present only a litany of facts and rhetoric that conflict, or appear to conflict, with an audience’s core values, they will often disregard the facts. What’s more, many audiences are less familiar with the details of controversies and policies than we are, which means we can quickly lose them. It is therefore important to connect arguments to universal values we all care about. Values central to the Rise Above Campaign include:

- Diversity
- Respect
- Dignity
- Equality
- Freedom
- Problem solving
- Community/unity (getting to know each other/working together)

**Promote Positive Solutions** - Emphasizing solutions counters “compassion fatigue,” in which people see a parade of social problems as impossible to solve. For example, most people agree that racial profiling is wrong, but question whether anything can be done about it and therefore question whether opposing it is worth their time or mental energy. Combining the condemnation of bad practices with a call for reforms like officer training, clear rules, and measures for accountability highlights a positive way forward and empowers audiences to act.

**Tell a Systemic Story** - Many stories focus on the plights of individuals - an easy and often compelling way to make a point about a certain issue. But research shows that an exclusive focus on such stories inadvertently suggests to audiences that people should solve the bulk of their problems themselves, without outside intervention or support. Instead of an inclusive health care system, for instance, an individual approach suggests we should have individual health savings accounts, or simply diet and exercise more. By contrast, placing human stories in a broader context—patients who challenged their insurance company, a doctor who sees her patients having to forgo treatment—connects our audience to systemic problems and solutions.

**Telling an Affirmative Story** - We're all faced with misleading, inaccurate, and untruthful statements about our issues. And we certainly can't allow misinformation to go unchallenged. But the best way to counter false information is to tell our affirmative story in ways that overcome the other side's falsehoods. By contrast, we should avoid myth-busting, or restating the false argument and then explaining why it's wrong. Research and experience show that this only results in deepening the myth in our audiences' minds. The better approach is to proactively tell our own story.

**Instead of:**

*There's a myth that affirmative action results in unqualified students being admitted to schools they're not prepared for, but let me explain why that's just a myth.*

**Try:**

*Affirmative action helps to maintain visibly open pathways to opportunity for well-qualified students from a range of backgrounds. We know it works, because of the improved success of all students who've benefitted from diverse classrooms and campuses.*

**Instead of:**

*Myth: Immigrants don't pay taxes. Fact: All immigrants pay taxes, whether income, property, sales, or other.*

**Try:**

*Immigrants are significant contributors to our economy, both as consumers and taxpayers, through sales, property, income, and other taxes.*

# Building a Message

To introduce people to a new way of thinking about issues, it's important to carefully consider the structure of our messages—particularly how they begin. People think in shortcuts and once we've activated a familiar shortcut, they are likely to process all future information through the lens of that shortcut. If we start with values and fit the importance of the programs we want into that framework, many audiences will find themselves more open to the rest of our points.

To this end, we suggest you build messages using the following structure:

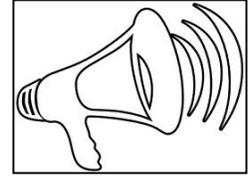
## Value, Problem, Solution, Action

- 1. Values.** Starting with shared values helps audiences to “hear” our messages more effectively than do dry facts or emotional rhetoric. Some communications experts recommend spending two-thirds of a message framing values, and then moving to problems, solutions, and actions. Some values that are important to Rise Above conversations include:
  - Diversity
  - Respect
  - Dignity
  - Equality
  - Freedom
  - Problem Solving
  - Community/Unity (getting to know each other/working together)
- 2. Problem.** This is the place to pull out statistics or stories that are likely to resonate with the target audience.
  - Frame problems as a threat to our vision and values.
  - Underscore our connections to one another, and why this problem matters to everyone.
  - Make sure you choose the right problem and clearly state it and who is responsible to fix it.
- 3. Solution.** In our zeal to point out problems, we often spend less time promoting solutions. This can result in crisis fatigue among key audiences. Positive solutions leave people with choices, ideas, and motivation.
  - What is the commonsense approach to the problem you have outlined?
  - Find ways to frame the solution as both the most commonsense and the most in line with our values.
  - Assign responsibility—who can enact this solution?
- 4. Action.** While the solution points out the overarching policy or program ask, the action is an audience-specific way to spur participation.
  - What can this specific target audience do? Try to give them something concrete that they can even picture themselves doing: making a phone call or sending an email.
  - Steer clear of vague “learn more” messages, when possible.

## Building a Message: Value, Problem, Solution, Action

### **Value [Sample language]**

*Our country thrives on the diversity of its people. When we come together to solve problems, we can put a variety of ideas and experiences on the table and find the best solutions.*



### **Problem**

*But lately we've seen politicians trying to divide us by making us afraid of those who are different from us, and by pushing divisive policies that exclude people because of what they look like, where they were born, or how they worship. That violates our values, and it makes us weaker.*

### **Solution**

*We need to come together as a community and get to know each other so that we can put all of our heads together to make our community as strong as possible and ensure a successful shared future.*

### **Action**

*Join our community meeting to get to know your community members and learn about how we can be stronger together.*

## What resonates with your audiences?

Circle any of the language or themes above that work for your organization. Use the space below to jot down other themes, phrases, and words that you can incorporate into messages.

## Build a Message

Choose an issue you're working on and build a message for a specific audience. Don't worry too much about exact wording yet. The goal is to identify themes that could work with your target audience. You can then craft them into messages according to the communications vehicle you are using to reach that particular audience (for instance, a letter to the editor, social media post, Op-ed, speech, and so on.)

**Value – Sample starters:** “We believe...” or “We are a city that believes...” “The future of our country rests on our ability to uphold our values of...”

**Problem – Sample starters:** “But that vision is in peril because...” “We’re not living up to those values when...”

**Solution – Sample starter:** “We can do better. We can...” “We need X to move us forward...”

**Action –** What can your audience specifically do to move toward the solution?

## GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

### Writing an Op-Ed

Op-eds are your chance to speak through the news media directly to policymakers, your constituents, and other target audiences. Papers will run op-eds from a range of sources, including experts, community voices, advocates, and those directly affected by issues. It is important for you to make the case as to why your voice should be included, providing biographical information and credentials and a persuasive argument about why your point of view is timely. The Value, Problem, Solution, Action formulation can also be helpful in drafting a persuasive op-ed.

Check the paper's guidelines. Outlets usually include op-ed guidelines on their websites, including information about desired length and how to submit. It is important to follow their guidelines closely, both to avoid the risk of rejection over technicalities and unwarranted editing due to length.

### Letters to the Editor and Online Comments

Letters to the editor are a quick and effective way to weigh in on issues that media frequently cover. Often, more people read the letters page than the pages where the original article appeared. Comments after a story are also a good place to reach audiences. Almost any story can generate a letter to the editor or comment; the key is to make sure that you use the opportunity to get the right messages in front of the right audience. Remember to use the VPSA structure and to keep letters around 100 words and comments to around 50.

#### Samples:

##### *To the editor:*

Your recent article about reductions in the school lunch program gave me pause. Every child deserves to have the tools they need to succeed in school, and nutrition is an important piece of that equation. Even more troubling: these cuts would disproportionately affect newcomers to our city, particularly Latino children. How we treat people, children in particular, shows what kind of community we are. When we allow one group to be left behind because they may currently have the quietest voice, we betray our values. We should make the right decisions for everyone in our community, regardless of what they look like or where they were born. We need to restore the full school lunch program.

##### *To the editor:*

Thank you for your recent coverage of our refugee neighbors and the challenges they are facing in this country (and to get here!). We are fortunate to have these new community members and it is my hope that we can learn from them. I believe we're stronger when we come together as a community, despite any of our differences, and use our growing diversity as a tool to solve problems. What fresh ideas may these newcomers bring to the table? How can their background and experiences help us shape new solutions for our community? I'm so hopeful about the possibilities.

## Sample News Story

The story below contains many of the themes of the Rise Above narrative. Organizers of the festival were able to get their themes in to the story by prepping their spokespeople so that a common thread, celebrating diversity, persisted throughout the entire story.

### **Perris Festival Celebrates Diverse Cultures (Excerpts)**

The City of Perris' annual multicultural festival drew local, regional, state, national and international dignitaries to celebrate the many communities that make Perris a culturally rich and diverse place to live, work and play.

The guests had one thing in common.

No matter where they arrived from, they were effusive in their praise for the City's commitment to diversity, its welcoming acceptance of immigrants and its ability to weave a fabric of a fabric of multicultural communities into a thriving City.

U.S. Rep Mark Takano, State Sen. Richard Roth and Perris Mayor Daryl Busch joined dignitaries on the stage to welcome visitors to the City's annual multicultural festival.

"The City of Perris represents the very best ideals of America," said U.S. Rep Mark Takano, D-Riverside, who represents Perris in Washington D.C. "It is important to celebrate our immigrant population, who come to this country and work so hard and thank them for making the U.S. such a great and diverse nation.

"I want to particularly thank the City of Perris for supporting this event," Takano added. "Perris lives up to the best ideals of our country. I'm proud to represent Perris in Congress."

The festival coincides with the 31st anniversary of the Perris-based group *TODEC (Training Occupational Development Educating Communities)* Legal Center, which advocates for immigrants and helps bring them into the mainstream of American life through education, employment and citizenship classes. TODEC founders Luz Maria and Antonio Ayala were presented with awards for their work with immigrants.

"This event brings our community together," Busch said. "Our multicultural festival is a great way to get everyone to participate in our community and we think that's a great idea. I'm glad to see everyone here and I hope everyone has a great day. Congratulations to TODEC for working for 31 years on behalf of our residents. We wish you another 31 years doing what you are doing for our community."

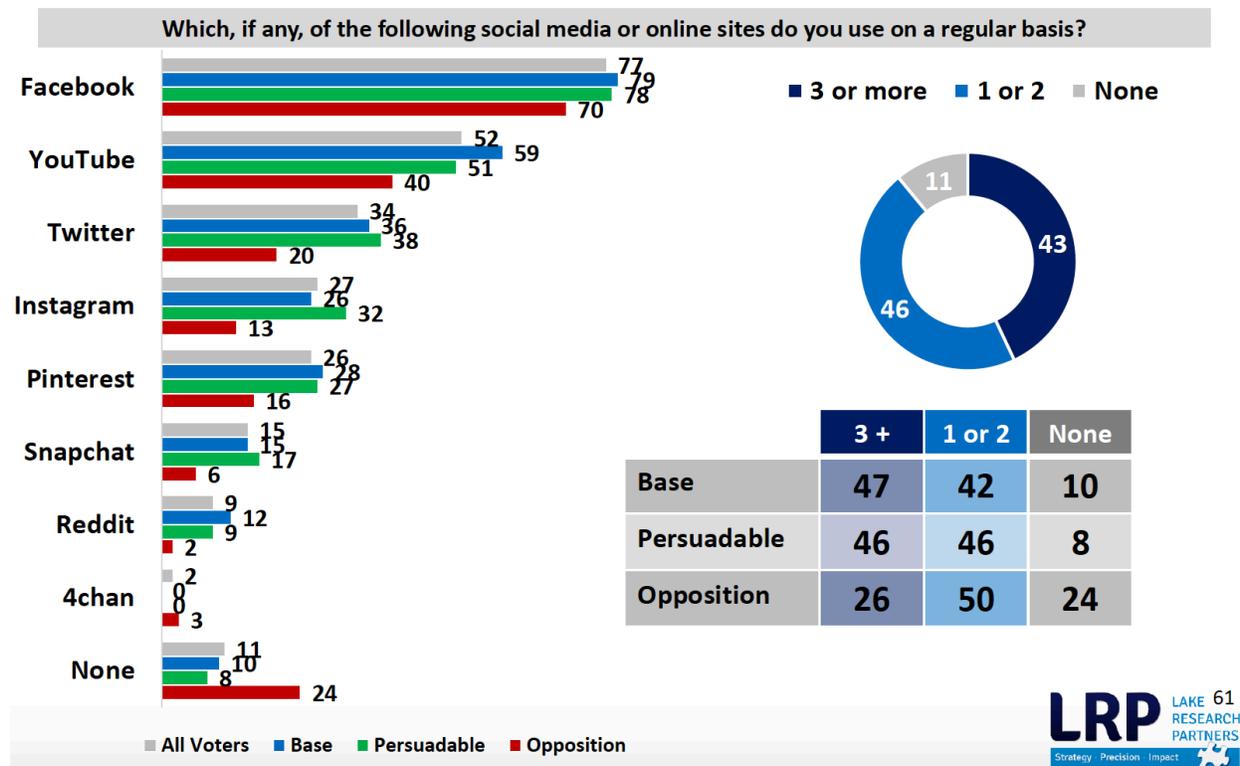
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"This is important because our residents get to see how we embrace our culture and our diversity," Burke said. "That makes for a better community."

[http://www.cityofperris.org/news/2015\\_stories/09-29-15\\_multicultural.html](http://www.cityofperris.org/news/2015_stories/09-29-15_multicultural.html)

## Social Media

As you can see from the chart below, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter remain the most active places for our audiences online. This section will focus primarily on Facebook and Twitter as the guidance here is primarily about written communications and not the video strategy that you would employ with YouTube.



## Facebook Strategy Tips

- When sharing your own content – whether it’s a new report or publicizing an event, find a way to tie it to the Rise Above narrative.
  - *Come to our community forum on homelessness issues. We need everyone’s thoughts and ideas – we’re stronger when we work together and share our diverse backgrounds and experiences with each other!*
  - *Check out our new report on the state budget. The choices we make here affect our whole state, so we all need to have a voice in them. Let’s rise above our differences and find a shared voice.*
  - *How we treat each other reflects what kind of community we are. And we have work to do to make sure everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Take a look at our report on racial profiling to see how we can address this issue together.*

- In addition to sharing your own content, find a few articles a week that exemplify the Rise Above narrative and frame them accordingly.
  - *This community grew tired of people trying to divide them with fear. They came together to protest the proposed border wall. Let's rise above our differences and do what's right for our communities.*
  - *Our kids all deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, no matter what they look like or where they were born. This school is doing a great job with that, substituting meditation for detention and other forms of punishment. Dignity for all of our children!*
  - *We all have a responsibility to call out discrimination and scapegoating when we see it. These folks had had enough of division and fear and proudly welcomed new refugees in to their community in the face of threats and backlash.*
- If you have images to choose from, try to use those that illustrate diversity and inclusion in action by showing groups of people from different racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.

## Twitter Strategy Tips

- As with Facebook, frame your own content on any articles you share within the Rise Above narrative by focusing on one of the core themes to highlight.
- In composing a tweet, consider which of the values/problem/solution/action elements you need to use to make your point, centering values first. For instance, if you want your audience to make a phone call, you might use a values/solution/action construction that hints at the problem, but doesn't go into detail.
  - *Make a call for equal treatment! Call your council rep and tell them we need more police oversight, not less. #YesOnProp3*
- Adopt allies' hashtags. Find out what other groups within the Rise Above campaign are using to tell their stories.

## EXERCISES

### Exercise 1: Rising Above in Community Forums

Asking questions of candidates and office holders, either directly, or via the media (“what I’d really like to know from the candidates is this:”), is a great messaging opportunity. It’s helpful to remember the Values, Problem, Solution, Action model for this as each component is important to include.

**Use the VPSA model to craft three more Rise Above community forum questions, using the issues you work on or care most about.**

#### **How to Apply VPSA to Candidate Questions:**

- “I believe” or “Americans believe” in VALUES, and how it applies to the issue I’m going to address.
- But: PROBLEM, include relevant statistics or background information here.
- Describe your SOLUTION, or the vision you think the solution should reach.
- Ask what ACTION the candidates will take to make sure the SOLUTION happens?

#### **Example:**

- Americans know that we’re stronger when we work together and include diverse opinions and experiences.
- But I’m hearing a lot about wanting to exclude people, bar people from coming here, throwing people out. I think that undermines one of our greatest strengths: our diversity and ability to learn from each other.
- I’d like to see a much more productive conversation that focuses on how we appreciate our differences instead of turning on each other or letting politicians scapegoat others.
- What will you do to ensure that we work toward solving our problems together, instead of just trying to divide us more?

## Exercise 2: Countering Fear-Based Messaging

In weaving our positive narrative into all of our communications, we also need to work on countering messages that are designed to evoke fear and division when we see them.

When going on the offensive, it's important to remember:

- We need to counter fear and fear-based messages rather than attack the person presenting them.
- “We can’t take the bait when people try to divide us with fear – that makes us weaker as a nation. We all know we’re stronger when we work together.”
- Once messages have triggered fear, we need to move audiences to some level of comfort before trying to move them on issues. Values-based messages can help with this.
- Use a positive vision to counter opponents’ negativity.

**Below are some examples of fear-based messages. In small groups, craft an overall approach for countering this type of rhetoric and develop some Rise Above messages.**

### Message 1

*“Even if it makes people mad, there is nothing wrong with a nation’s leaders adjusting its immigration policy, even its refugee policy, to reduce the prospect of harm to that nation, and to serve its own interests.”<sup>2</sup>*

### Message 2

*“Will a border fence cost money? Will it look aesthetically displeasing in some places? Sure, but the cost of illegal immigration on our welfare, education, hospitals, criminal justice system, highway safety, drug violence, and culture is incalculable and infinite. And the sight of dead bodies and drug smugglers is more offensive than a security barrier.”<sup>3</sup>*

### Message 3

*“Profiling is unavoidably unfair to individuals. But those targeted should understand it is a fact of life that those who resemble those who threaten will be viewed with suspicion. Group membership matters and symbols convey information. Tattoo a teardrop near the corner of your eye and police will notice.”<sup>4</sup>*

### Message 4

*“As Governor, my top priority is public safety, and this bill furthers that objective by keeping dangerous criminals off our streets,” said Governor Abbott. “It’s inexcusable to release individuals from jail that have been charged with heinous crimes like sexual assault against minors, domestic violence and robbery. There are deadly consequences to not enforcing the law, and Texas has now become a state where those practices are not tolerated. With this bill we are doing away with those that seek to promote lawlessness in Texas.”<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/true-things-about-the-trump-immigration-ban/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.conservativereview.com/articles/border-fences-work>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/commentary/ct-jesse-jackson-michael-brown-garner-holder-profiling-race-perspec-1218-jm-20141217-story.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://gov.texas.gov/news/signature/23490>

## Exercise 3: Local Media Exercise

Gather 8 – 10 articles from local newspapers that talk about a crisis facing your community.

Be sure to track these articles over a period of weeks and include different media sources and perspectives. Once you've assembled the articles have your leadership review them.

### Consider the following questions:

- What are the main themes of these articles? Do you see attempts to divide or scare audiences?
- What solutions, if any, do the articles suggest?
- How do they either support or oppose Rise Above messaging?
- Who do local media look to for comments on these articles?
- How do articles like these shape the responses of everyday people, both those affected by the crisis at hand as well as those looking in from the outside?

## Exercise 4: Rising Above in Campaigns

Use some of the language from the general talking points to re-think a local campaign. Brainstorm about how changing your message creates new media opportunities or the potential to attract new allies.

### Consider the following questions:

- How can we see our local campaign through the Rise Above lens?
- Do our current messages reflect values that undercut what we really want for our community?
- Based on the research, how can our local campaign respond to negative, fear-based rhetoric from the other side, based on the research?
- Do we think the local media will accept this campaign messaging, or will they resist it?

## Exercise 5: Rising Above in Social Media

Gather 5-6 recent headlines about your issue(s) and ask participants to:

1. Decide whether or not it would be strategic to respond to each headline.
2. Build a values-based tweet or Facebook post about the headline.
3. Share and discuss.