




MESSAGING TIPS

Making the most of language and values for persuasive communication




This resource is based on the findings of Anglicare Australia's report *The real story: What Australians think about poverty and how we shape the debate*.

The research can help communicators, fundraisers, and other advocates who want to know:

- » How to **change the conversation** about poverty, welfare, and other important issues
- » How to **tap into values and change minds**
- » How to communicate more persuasively and **build support for our causes**
- » How to **connect with donors** and fundraise more strategically.

We hope these tips can help you apply the research in your own work.



The goal of all communications is to activate and connect with the values of our audiences, instead of relying on facts or policy arguments to engage them.

We can't often set the terms of the debate, so we must be strategic in expressing what we want. These tips are based on Anglicare Australia's recent research on attitudes and language, and our work with Common Cause Australia.

Communicating using values

The best messaging appeals to people's values. Everyone has *intrinsic* (compassionate) and *extrinsic* (selfish) values. Everyone favours one set of values over another.

Intrinsic (not extrinsic) values are our friends.

Intrinsic values include those for self-acceptance, broad mindedness, affiliation, community feeling and social justice.

Extrinsic values include those for conformity, image, social recognition, popularity, preservation of one's public image, wealth, financial success and authority.

Australians are more likely to have intrinsic values but they are also *more likely to incorrectly perceive that others have extrinsic values*. This is why so many people fail to act on their beliefs, vote in accordance with their values, or take action on issues they see as important.

How to use values

Priming values changes attitudes and behaviour.

People who were asked to think about pros and cons of honesty and loyalty (intrinsic values) were *more likely to be helpful* when asked, compared to those who were asked to think about pros and cons of successfulness and ambition (extrinsic values).

[Use language that makes your solution sound natural.](#) Don't use metaphors that appeal to extrinsic values or evoke unhelpful ideas.

For example, don't say "Increasing government payments will stop people from spending their whole lives on welfare, and save money in the longer term." This triggers extrinsic values and actually encourages your audience to view people as a cost.

Say "Everyone needs help at some point in their lives. We should be a country that looks after people when they need it most, instead of forcing them bear the brunt of 'tough budget decisions'." This triggers values of universalism and benevolence.

[Include a target in your message and direct blame at them.](#) Every story needs a villain - do not use passive language when talking about the problem or obstacle.

Don't say "Cuts are hurting people who need help." This stops people from understanding the cause of the problem, and makes them more apathetic to solutions.

Say "The Government's cuts are hurting people who need help." This creates a direct causal link between the target and the harm, and makes people more invested solving the problem.

[Don't repeat an unhelpful message,](#) even to refute it.

Don't say "We understand the need for budget repair." It reinforces a frame that works against us.

Say "We shouldn't be targeting people who can afford it the least."

[Don't hedge.](#) Say it and mean it.

Don't say "More community housing will help us tackle housing affordability."

Say "If we're serious about tackling housing affordability, we need more community housing." This makes it clear that our solution is essential.

Language to avoid

Replace	Embrace
Clients, consumers	People relying on income support, people who need help
Fix our broken system, tackle the problem	Create a fairer society, be a community that helps people
People need security, survival	People need stability, to live in peace, care for their families
Harms has been caused, people are being hurt	Government is ignoring, government is choosing
False savings, not cost-effective	Everybody needs help at some point

The bottom line: Bringing it all together

- » Lead with intrinsic values like family, freedom, fairness and treating others as you'd want to be treated.
- » Provide aspirational calls to create something good. Effective messages are two parts solution to one part problem.
- » Don't be afraid to name the cause of harms – 'government decided' or 'leaders chose', avoid skirting blame – 'conditions worsened' 'harms were caused'. To believe a problem can be fixed through human action, people must believe human action caused it.
- » Use verbs like choose, create and decide to imply current conditions deliberately constructed.

More information is available in the 2018 State of the Family report, *The real story: What Australians think about poverty and how it can change*.