

Policy Matters COVID messaging
How we got here, How to rebuild.
5.6.20

What's our frame:

A PROPERLY FUNDED and ACCOUNTABLE government can and does make a positive difference in our lives and in our communities. Government is how we all do our part to make sure everyone has the resources they need to thrive.

Message components

1. Lead with values not with problems.
2. Call people in across race/gender/geography
3. Name a villain. Doesn't have to be specific. Can be: "certain lawmakers", "the greedy few," "wealthy special interests" or "the richest 1%."
4. Provide analysis about why we got to a place where we are so unprepared.
5. Lift up what's most important: our health, well-being and living good lives.
6. Build a bigger "we" by alienating the opposition and calling everyone else in.

Message themes

1. Need for shared responsibility - for everyone to do their part - including the wealthy and corporations.
2. Emphasize what we are calling for "is necessary and within reach"
3. Balance "we can see a problem ahead" with "there's a way to steer around it."
4. Place any racial disparities in context - tying back to policy choices - linking to problem/villain.

Things to avoid

1. Stay away from debating on the other sides' terms - avoid myth-busting.
2. Be careful of using "invest" -which can sound transactional rather than about what the right thing to do...it plays into the other side's "economic growth above all" frame
3. Don't use weather metaphors! EVER...even if you think it works in the context.
4. Watch out for otherizing language like "the disabled" or "the elderly"
5. PASSIVE VOICE! This is not just about conjugating verbs, but about showing intentionality and cause and effect. Be specific about what is causing the problems you highlight. Problems described passively appear to have no known cause and thus no achievable solution.

EASY MESSAGE FORMULA: VALUES, PROBLEM, SOLUTION, ACTION

VALUES:

Interconnectedness

Our own well-being depends on the health of the people next to us, and the people next to them. Government is how all of us - black, white and brown - can pull together and get through this difficult time.

When things get tough, we can come together across differences to care for one another and confront challenges to make things better than they were before.

Resiliency

Ohioans of all races have pulled together to face big problems before. We came together across race in the fight for civil rights, for fair pay and safe workplaces. We can do it again.

Family/love

Everyone, no matter what they look like or where they live, wants health and well-being for themselves and the people they love.

We all want the younger generation to have the opportunity to follow their dreams.

PROBLEM

Ohio policymakers missed opportunities to prepare, choosing to use public resources for corporate handouts and big tax breaks for the wealthy and well-connected. Now Gov. DeWine wants to cut \$775 million from K-12, higher education and Medicaid.

A handful of powerful interests used their influence to rig the rules so they profit off the public's resources through tax giveaways and tax cuts. Now they are using budget deficits caused by the pandemic to punish the people we depended on the most during the crisis.

Black, brown and Indigenous communities have always been denied the resources they need to be healthy and so it is absolutely predictable that they are the communities hit hardest by COVID-19 and its economic consequences.

SOLUTIONS

focus less on the details or technical name of the policy - more on what the policy will achieve for people

In the short term, Gov. DeWine can use the people's money in the state's rainy-day fund to make sure everyone who needs it gets medical care and all Ohio students - from those in pre-k to those getting PhDs - get an excellent education that prepares them for the future and to follow their dreams.

Instead of cutting taxes for the richest 1% and corporations, Ohio's leaders can use our collective resources to make sure everyone has clean water, everyone has healthy food to eat and every Ohio child is educated and nurtured at a great school.

ACTION

Now is the time for Ohioans from all walks of life to join together and push our leaders to rewrite the rules so that when the pandemic ends, every one of us can care for our families, earn a fair return for our work and protect the people who protected us.

Sample messages on cuts & rebuilding

No matter what we look like or where we come from, we all have a part to play in getting Ohio through and beyond the COVID crisis. Only government can use public resources to take care of people when they are sick and make sure our children get a great education. Gov. DeWine should marshal our public resources to do the most good for the most people - that means tapping into the rainy-day fund now instead of cutting education - and closing tax breaks for the wealthy and special interests to raise revenue for the future. Now is the time for Ohioans from all walks of life unite to use our government as intended: to take care of each other.

Ohio stands strongest when we stand together - Black, White and Brown. The early stages of our response to COVID-19 made that clear. Now, as powerful outside influencers try to divide us along racial and religious lines, it's more important than ever to help each other. Gov. Mike DeWine's budget cuts do the opposite by putting public schools and colleges on the chopping block. Public education is one of our best tools for building an Ohio where everyone has a fair shot at a good life. Let's pull together to protect it.