



Promoting positive opinion about refugees: Toolkit basics

Introduction

Welcoming refugees benefits both communities where they settle and the people who are able to escape persecution and build new lives. Those involved in welcoming refugees know this well, but not everyone does. There is a constant need to counter misperceptions and promote better understanding about refugees.

This toolkit is intended to help us get better at sharing stories, initiating better conversations and driving more productive community narratives that involve those who came to Canada to seek refuge from persecution.

Objectives

This toolkit aims to help us to :

- Initiate more effective conversations with people in the middle (persuadables).
- Drive more productive community narratives that involve those who came to Canada to seek refuge from persecution.
- Share stories that can influence people in the middle (persuadables).

Values underlying messages

Communications are more effective when they are based on values that are shared by those with whom we are communicating.

The following are relevant values that are widely held and can underlie our messages:

- Building community together.
- Improving opportunities for us all, including the most vulnerable.
- Upholding human rights.
- Acting for humanitarian reasons.

Key messages

- People who have come to Canada as refugees renew and benefit our communities in many ways. We are better together economically, socially and culturally.
- Communities across Canada work with and are energized by newcomers who arrived here as refugees. When we work together, we are creating a better future for all of us.

Cautions

- **Put forward shared values and positive messages, don't 'bust myths':** Research shows that 'busting myths' may serve to legitimize the point we are debunking. Myth-busting is also only effective to people who are already convinced. We need to respond to concerns by offering solutions in a positive and values-based way.
- **Don't focus on those who can't be persuaded:** Once you've established you are speaking with someone who's opposing, negative views of refugee contributions are entrenched, move on. We cannot hope to change everyone's mind.

Using the toolkit

The elements in the toolkit are intended to help communities collect and share local stories in order to connect with and encourage the support of people who are more interested in constructive conversations.

This toolkit offers a mix of resources: from collecting stories, to creating portraits to share in your community, to sharing one another's stories respectfully, to creating messages that shift people's perception of those who seek refuge here, by defining them less by their struggles and more by their triumphs (also known as "reframing" in communications theory). You will notice that the messaging themes are pragmatic and are designed to draw out stories about all the ways communities benefit economically through welcoming refugees. What should be emphasized, though, is that at the core of these messages, is the belief that communities across Canada are much better off when everyone feels like they are a part of it. That is why the storytelling activities also include a call to share stories of those who are working (either in the sector or through community volunteering). 'Persuadables,' need to see themselves reflected and find a point of entry into the larger positive narrative that we are all better together.

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Promoting positive opinion about refugees: Identifying your audiences

To win more support for refugees, we recommend focusing on the ‘persuadables’: people who are neither strongly supporting refugees, nor strongly opposed to refugees. Polls tell us that the ‘persuadables’ represent approximately 39% of the Canadian public. ‘Persuadables’ are people who can be persuaded to support better and more generous refugee policies – but they could also go the way of the opposition. Some call them the ‘anxious middle.’

The messages and activities in this toolkit are designed with the ‘persuadables’ in mind.

Addressing those who strongly and directly oppose refugees requires a different set of strategies and messaging. It also likely requires more work with less chance of success.

a. Overview of reachable audiences

Who in our communities might be within reach and open to listening to our messages? Who might be allies in connecting you with the ‘persuadables’? What types of considerations might seem most relevant to them?

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Faith Communities</p> <p>Members in churches, mosques, synagogues and other faith communities are often open to our cause because of the principles of their faith.</p> <p>Some in the community are likely actively involved through sponsoring, volunteering with or otherwise supporting refugees.</p> | <p>Community Members (non-religious)</p> <p>They are active building your community. From local parents associations or other informal groups, such as local moms’ groups, reading groups, employee clubs, sports clubs.</p> <p>They are an integral part of building community, which means there are opportunities to connect with them about building local community.</p> |
| <p>Business</p> <p>People active in the business sector want to see a growing economy: this means bringing in new customers or attracting new talent.</p> <p>Local business owners, the Chamber of Commerce, specific sectors (such as technology, banking, credit unions) may be ready audiences.</p> | <p>Local Institutions</p> <p>Local institutions such as municipal councils, libraries, schools, museums and galleries, recreational and community centres have an interest in building a strong community.</p> <p>They are looking for ways to connect their institution with the community at large.</p> |

b. Questions to identify audiences

Think about the people in your community who might be open to productive messaging and conversations about all the benefits to communities when refugees are welcomed and supported. Do they match any of the categories of audiences in the chart above? Or are they part of another category of audiences?

Once you have thought of general audience categories, brainstorm with your team about the questions below.

Describe their demographic background: (age, race, socio-economic background / work and occupation)

Values - Think / Feel / Do

- What do they care most about? Do their values overlap with your organization or groups work?
- Do you know what their day-to-day lives look like?
- What might be some barriers to them supporting better refugee policies?
- Who influences them and who do they trust? (In the community, family, media).

Where do they get their news and information?

- Local paper's columnists?
- Church newsletters and bulletins, faith magazines and newspapers?
- News outlets (print, digital, radio, tv)

All of these questions will help you draw a better picture of the 'persuadables' in your community.

The answers should also help you craft messages and deliver them in more effective ways. Your messages should:

- speak to your audience's concerns and values (**what** the message says)
- be communicated by people they value and trust (**who** brings the message)
- be disseminated to where your audiences are at (**how** the message reaches your audience).



Promoting positive opinion about refugees: Messages

Research on effective messaging in support of refugees shows that addressing people's values and emotions are the most impactful ways to persuade those who are considered 'persuadables'.

Storytelling is one of the more powerful ways we can connect real people and lives and get beyond the terms that can evoke stereotypes. What types of stories work best? Stories that lead with values.¹

Similarly, research on public opinion messaging also shows that the 'persuadables' are interested in seeing stories that include the 'welcomer' in the frame. In other words, stories about community members who have welcome refugees (sponsors, business owners who've donated items, volunteers who have given time and friendship, people who have opened up their homes, etc.) People are more likely to be inspired to be welcoming when they see how others in the community have had enriching experiences welcoming refugees.

Shared values:

- Building community together
- Improving opportunities for us all, including the most vulnerable.
- Upholding human rights
- Acting for humanitarian reasons

Key messages:

1. People who have come as refugees, through their presence, renew and benefit communities across Canada, economically, socially and culturally.
2. Communities across Canada work with newcomer refugees. When we work together to build our communities, we are creating a better future for all of us.

To stay focused on the values-based messaging, we will:

- Lead with shared values of community, togetherness, building towards a future
- Talk about community-based impacts, not just individual successes
- Keep solutions front and centre, rather than focusing on the problems alone

¹ Overseas Development Institute, [Public perceptions of refugees and migrants: the role of politicians, the media and civil society](#). February 2017.



Promoting positive opinion about refugees: Messaging tips

Speaking tips

- Keep your message simple and short. Use language that everyone will understand (nothing technical, unless it is critical to what you are saying).
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Share (short) stories and examples that others can relate to (at a common place in your community – like a school, a well-known business or niche a business is filling, a park, place of worship, for example).
- Appeal to emotions. Emotions help people remember your message much more than logic and statistics! Sharing a joke or a laugh is helpful too.
- Be brief. Don't describe all of the small details.
- If someone asks you a question or about details you don't want to talk about, direct your answers to something you want to say.
- Invite people to act: people will remember your message if they can do something. How can they find out more? How can they get involved in the community efforts you're talking about?
- **Practise** what you want to say in advance. Figure out how to tell stories effectively and in a few words. Have a friend ask you questions (even tough ones!)

What to avoid:

- The opposition's language (bogus refugees, queue-jumpers, etc.) Don't use these words: the more they are said, the more they stick in people's minds. We want people repeating our messages, not someone else's.
- Naming opponents to our views (like the names of neo-Nazi groups, Conservative Party critics, etc.). Don't use their names: we want people to remember the faces and stories behind refugee contributions and community collaborations.

Getting used to values-based messages

Below are a few sentences illustrating what we mean by messages “leading with values”. These are phrases you can use in public talks, organizational materials or just in conversations in your daily life.

It is useful to think of ways these phrases can be connected to personal stories (of people who came as refugees or of the community working together to welcome refugees).

a. Phrases emphasizing connectedness

The goal is to underscore that: We are all connected; our futures are connected and that we're stronger when we work together.

"Now, more than ever, we know that our lives are all connected, which means that the only way forward is to value each other's contributions and to work together."

"Our communities thrive when we work together to face the future."

"In this interconnected world, we really are stronger when we work together. When we do, it's beautiful."

"In this moment in our lives, I think most of us recognize that our world is so interconnected. Our actions have consequences beyond ourselves. Our fates are linked. That's why our community / our group is working together."

"When we work as a community to solve problems, we all move forward."

"Because we're all connected, bad policies hurt all of us – threatening what we value: standing together values and disrupting our communities."

"This is really about Community Values: Are we going to acknowledge that we're all in this together, and that we need to look out for each other?"

"Look, in this group / in our community, we're all on the same team. We know that Canada thrives when we draw on our Community Values to solve problems and that is the only way in today's interconnected world."

b. Phrases emphasizing human rights

"We know that moving your family to make a better life is one of the hardest things a person can do. Sometimes even moving across town is hard enough! Just imagine what it must be like if we are forced to move, to save our lives."

"If we arrived as immigrants here or our families did, then we all know how hard it is to pick-up and move. Moving is a difficult choice to make. That's why I / we in this community / group / want to welcome people who are seeking refuge here."

"Today, as always, people move to make life better for themselves and their families. No matter our differences, most of us want pretty similar things."

"When we look at the history of those who found refuge here, regardless of how they arrived, refugee newcomers have always renewed, enriched and contributed so much to communities already here."

Words that Work

What type of words and phrasing work when trying to change deeply held perceptions and beliefs about people who are seeking refuge? Based on research on ground-breaking research to find the words that work and that change the debate around people seeking refuge, these are words that help target **Persuadables**.

| Move Towards | Shift from | Because... |
|---|--|--|
| Live in peace, care for children, live free from danger, safety | Security, survival | Portrays people who seek refuge as people with dignity and agency |
| Seeking safety, rebuilding lives where it's safe, looking to set up a safe home | Fleeing persecution, violence and torture | Explaining positive motivations rather than the push factors increase understanding |
| It is legal to seek asylum; when people cross borders their human rights come with them | It is not illegal to seek asylum; not a security issue | Negating a frame brings the frame you want to avoid to top of mind. Best to say what we are <u>for</u> . |
| People seeking refuge / safety | Refugees | <p>This is difficult because in communications, we are trying to be brief. However, just be mindful that mass nouns evoke stereotyping effects and eclipse the individuals and their stories.</p> <p>Helping audiences focus in on real people, not imagine an undifferentiated mass of moving bodies.</p> |

Adapted from [Anat Shenker-Osorio](#) of [ASO Communications](#).

Examples of suggested responses to concerns raised

Example 1

Concern: Some refugee families require more financial support than predicted. What now? Refugee families aren't succeeding as we would have hoped.

Response: Often we need to look to the long-term successes.

- Look long term – note: statistics on tax contributions of former refugees vs. other Canadians: **Refugees earn more than most Canadians after 25 years** (Vancouver Sun); **Migrants and refugees are good for economics** (Nature)
- Successes of refugee-led small businesses outstrip the success of small businesses started by other Canadians
- Look to second-generation successes: Thousands of descendants of South-East Asian boat people work as medical professionals in Quebec (pharmacists, doctors, etc.) With a current shortage of medical personnel, how much worse would the situation be without these vital skills? *Include local examples here!*

Example 2

Concern: Refugee families are moving to urban areas, rather than staying here.

Response: Small communities are vital to helping refugee families springboard into a new life in Canada. Your efforts make a difference.

- Include local examples here of refugees who have moved elsewhere and who have returned to thank first sponsors, for example this [Thank you letter to refugee supporters](#) (Western Star) *Include local examples here!*

Example 3

Concern: We have limited housing options in our community already. We can't house refugee families too.

Response: We should be scaling up teamwork, not dissension' to resolve the long-standing leadership vacuum on affordable housing options. ([Stop blaming refugee claimants for problems we've chosen not to solve](#), Ottawa Citizen). *Include local examples here!*

Example 4

Concern: Recent reports of crime by refugees are sparking concerns over security in the community.

Response: Point to statistics showing that crimes by refugees and newcomers are very rare, and even lower than other population groups (see: CCR web resources like [Welcoming newcomers decreases crime](#) and [Myths vs. facts](#)).

- In times of tragedy, there is strength in community. Use any opportunities to start conversations and learn about our neighbours, rather than resorting to stigmas.
- Speak about refugees around you, what they are like and the contributions they are making. Encourage notable community members to do the same. Isolated incidents should not overshadow the hard work and progress in creating better and stronger communities together.
- You might also speak about how future generations of refugee families are giving back in ways that strengthen our communities. Among them we find [police chiefs \(Minh-Tri Truong\)](#), thousands of medical personnel, care providers, and others playing critical community roles, as [visible leaders \(Sharmarke Dubow\)](#), [lesser known Canadian icons \(Hieu C. Truong\)](#) and unsung, [everyday heroes \(Mohamed-Mamon Alhoms\)](#). *Include your own local examples here!*

Example 5

Concern: Others in our community need our help. We can't help everyone.

Response: Refugees are giving back, whether it's in making donations after disasters (money, blood banks, hair extensions) or in boosting local economies, starting businesses (example: [Successful refugee business owners](#), CBC), creating jobs, etc.



Promoting positive opinion about refugees: Pivoting

Pivoting is a technique that is used to move from a negative or distracting question or comment back to our positive message. This requires message discipline. Depending on the context, your job is not to educate. Your job is to use their question as an opportunity to deliver your strongest message as effectively as possible.

Example: Isn't refugee intake a major drain on our economy? How can we really afford it?

There are three parts to a pivot

1. **Connect** to the value(s) in question

Example: "I'm glad you asked about public finance, we all want to make sure our country is prosperous."

2. Contrast and **reframe the idea**.

Example: I'm sure you'd agree that we need to look at the value of investing in refugees over both the short and the long term. While protecting refugees involves some short term costs, they are made up for by long term economic contributions.

3. **Deliver your message**

Example: "Refugees over the long term contribute to our communities in so many ways, economic and other ..."

Phrases to use to help bridge or pivot to what you want to say:

"Actually..."

"That's a good question. (pause) Here's how I think about this issue..."

"The real question is..."

"The important thing to remember is..."

"What we are really talking about here is..."

"What matters most is..."

"To put this in broader perspective..."

"I would like to emphasize that..."

"Let's not lose sight of the core problem..."

“At the heart of the matter is...”

“Taking a closer look what we see is....”

Tips for handling difficult questions:

- Look for what you and questioner have in common: reality, experience, perspective, beliefs.
- Stay respectful.
- Take a stand and explain patiently why you hold these views.
- Move from problem to solutions. Connect your proposition to the person, to vision and values.
- It's alright if you don't know the answer.

Tips based on a CCR webinar ‘[How to counter and pivot negative messages about refugees](#)’ with Jennifer Story of StoryStiles communication



Promoting positive opinion about refugees: Being an active listener

How to be an active listener for social change

- R** Receive (pay attention to the person, actively listen, lean in)
- A** Appreciate ('hmm...', 'oh', 'okay')
- S** Summarize (So...')
- A** Ask (ask questions afterwards)

Adapted from: [Five ways to listen better](#) - 7 minutes worth watching!

How to keep the conversation flowing

Here are some ways to stay at ease, curious, inviting and keep the conversation flowing:

- Tell me more about...(If your curiosity is piqued)
- This is what I heard you say... is it what you meant? (If your instinct is to counter another's statement)
- What led you to this point of view? (If you are with someone who advocates for a fixed position)
- I notice your passion on this issue; what makes this so important for you? (If someone begins lecturing and intellectualizing)
- What if the opposite were true? (If you are with someone who always agrees with you)
- Can you say that in another way? (If you suspect you don't understand)
- I'd like to offer another point of view... (If you hold a different opinion)
- I'm wondering if you have some thoughts or feelings about what you've been hearing... (If someone has been silent)
- If what you are proposing came to pass, how would things be different? (If someone's ideas are very abstract)

Adapted from: [Bread and Borders Toolkit](#)

Some other tips

- Be respectful in one's language and tone. Avoid "demonizing" those with different perspectives
- Avoid personal criticism or labelling
- Be prepared for uncomfortable conversations. We **MUST** have them to arrive at greater understanding and dialogue.

Adapted from: Andrew Griffith, ['We can have open, respectful debates on immigration'](#)



Promoting positive opinion about refugees: Sharing stories

There are many ways of sharing stories: posters, anecdotes included in speeches or published materials, videos shared online or through social media, among other ways. Taking stories to local media can often be an effective way of reaching thousands of people.

Focus your energies on where you have opportunities to reach your audience. There is little point spending a lot of time developing materials if few people are going to see them.

Depending on how you plan to share the stories, the points below may or may not be relevant.

Story Collection

Start by gathering the elements you need to tell great stories. Below are a list of questions to help prompt your story collection and writing.

Important note: Not everyone wants to have their experiences or pictures shared with broader audiences. We need to be sensitive to this and avoid making anyone feel that they are under pressure to agree to share their story.

a. Strategies for successful story collection

Here are a few strategies to collect stories in your community, your sponsorship group or organization. You may already have a process in place, in which case, that's great! These are suggestions to start you off:

- Make an announcement! Let your colleagues, friends, families, church, community members know that you're collecting stories. Be clear why you are asking them to identify stories.
- If people express interest in sharing their stories, meet directly with them. Explain clearly why you are collecting stories and how and where the stories and photos might be shared.
- Prepare a Consent Form (see model below). Review the consent form with the person carefully and encourage them to ask any questions.
- If the participants have agreed to share their stories and have photos taken for the portraits, remind them the day of your meeting. Alternatively, ask them to provide photos they would like to use.
- Prepare a list of open-ended questions you would like to ask them. Record direct quotes to get their perspectives! You can use the list of questions, below.

b. Tips for preparing questions

What are the steps to good storytelling? Here are some questions to ask yourself, colleagues, group members, and community members.

- Who is the story about? Who are the main characters? Do you know them directly or is this through your group / organization / friend?
- What were the circumstance that brought them to your community? For now, remind yourself whether this person or family arrived as GAR, PSR, Refugee Claimant. If this story is about the community volunteers or private sponsors, make a note about that.
- If this is a story about people who are supporting refugees, how did that support start? What inspired it or what was the first community activity?
- What has this person / group / family brought to your community?
 - If the story is about newcomer refugees or people who arrived as refugees many years ago, it can be as delightful as “Adiam provides critical nursing care in one of Calgary’s busiest hospitals, treating children in the intensive care unit.”
 - If this story is about community volunteers or sponsors, what has their involvement meant to them?
- How is your community better as a result?
- What would this person / group, neighbours, employers, teachers, etc. say about them (real life quote if possible)?
- What is the situation today?
- What can we learn from this story? What opportunities do we have to support this person’s work in the community?
- How does this story fit into one of the key messages?

c. Sharing stories

Once you’ve brainstormed and listed some stories and the main elements you’d like to share, **you may need to distill the stories into brief points (e.g. if you are developing a poster)**. Here are a few questions to help get to the heart of the stories:

- Who is in the story? Where does the story begin? For example, if someone who arrived as a refugee is sharing the story, and they are a nurse, doctor or in the medical profession now, the story could begin with the moment they were inspired to take up the profession, rather than when they arrived in Canada.
- What is the greater truth we want to tell about ourselves and our communities?

Adapted from *Welcoming America, Reframing Refugees Messaging toolkit*.

d. Where can you share portraits?

- Newsletters in print and digital
- Congregation Bulletin / newsletters

- Submit to relevant publications
- Presentations in print or digital

e. With whom and where to share portraits

- Your organization, between members of your sponsorship group, with your place of worship, other community partners and agencies, public libraries, or other public displays, ie; city hall, community centres
- Who else has overlapping messages of inclusivity?
 - Approaching local immigrant employment councils and offering them materials
 - Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) and other community partners
 - Business partners
- Do you, friends or family have employee public awareness programs at your office? Many corporate employers, such as credit unions and banks have diversity and inclusion days or offer special programs for newcomer refugees and immigrants to set-up accounts. You can offer these materials to the employees.

Story Inspirations from Canada and CCR Members

Hassan (Vancouver, BC)

The owner of a home renovations business in Syria, Hasan arrived on the west-coast of Canada, eager to rebuild a life with his family. He's now launched a Flooring and Tiling business in BC, where Hasan and his team help others in his community renovate and build their dream homes.

*Story inspiration from the [BC Refugee Hub](#)

“ Anybody looking for work, I try to help them...I feel so happy because everyone who needs help, I can help them. ”

Hassan

Chefs of Tayybeh (Vancouver, BC)

The all-female team of Chefs at Tayybeh started their full-service catering company with a sold-out pop-up dinner in Vancouver. Arriving from Syria just few years ago, they met one another on Canada's west-coast while working to rebuild their families lives in their new communities.

*Story inspiration from the [BC Refugee Hub](#)

“ Success means many things: finishing university, learning the language...we're offering this food that people love and ask for! ”

Chefs of Tayybeh

Model consent form

[Name of organization]

Consent for use of story/photograph/video-recording

Purpose

[Name of organization] is working to promote positive public opinion about refugees by presenting publicly the stories and faces of individuals. The goal is to put human faces on the realities of refugees and to make the public in Canada more knowledgeable about all the ways that people who arrive as refugees contribute to communities economically, culturally, and socially.

Conditions of participation

Participation is entirely voluntary.

[Outline how the stories /photos /videos will be collected, reviewed with the individuals and shared publicly (in print, online, in posters, on social media). Include information on how long they will be available publicly, if possible.]

If you have any questions, we encourage you to ask them before signing the consent.

Consent

In signing this document:

- I give permission for the interview, photos and/or videos taken of me to be used by [Name of organization] in its materials.
- I understand that the materials may be distributed to the general public.
- I understand that the photos may be posted on the internet and used as part of a public awareness campaign.

I have read the information above and I understand it fully. I freely give my consent to participating according to these conditions.

FIRST NAME : _____ LAST NAME: _____

I also consent to my first name being used.

I would like the following fictitious first name to be used: _____

SIGNATURE: _____

EMAIL and PHONE NUMBER: _____

DATE _____

Questions? Contact:



Promoting positive opinion about refugees: Additional resources

Tools for effective public messaging:

[Bread and Borders: Exploring Fears, Facts & Impacts About Refugee Claimants in Manitoba, A resource for engaging in meaningful dialogue](#) (Refugee Claimant Public Education Working Group of Winnipeg)

[Five ways to listen better](#) (Ted Talk)

[Reframing Refugees Messaging Toolkit](#) (note: the key messages here are tailored to audiences and popular values in the US rather than ones tested and recommended we use in Canada) (Welcoming Refugees)

[Telling an affirmative story](#) (Opportunity Agenda)

[Grassroots communications tips](#) (Narrative insurgency)

[The Opportunity Agenda - Using the Value, Problem, Solution, Action Model from this toolkit](#)

[Battle of the story worksheet](#) (Progressive Tech)

[How to counter and pivot negative messages about refugees](#) (Canadian Council for Refugees):

Research on effective messaging:

Anat Shenker-Osorio and ASO Communications. [“Immigrant Rights Style Guide: Words that Work”](#)

[Messaging this Moment: A Handbook for Progressive Communications](#)

Overseas Development Institute. [Working Paper: Understanding public attitudes towards refugees and migrants](#). 2017.

OHCHR, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. [Shaping the public narrative on migration](#). 2016.

For local organizers:

[Living Room Conversations](#) (Rural Organizing Project)